

**MAKING WORKERS:  
A FOUCAULDIAN-INFLUENCED POSTSTRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF THE  
PURPOSES OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE EDUCATION**

A Dissertation  
by  
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Submitted to the Graduate School  
at Appalachian State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

May 2020  
Educational Leadership Doctoral Program  
Reich College of Education

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## **Abstract**

### **MAKING WORKERS: A FOUCAULDIAN-INFLUENCED POSTSTRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF THE PURPOSES OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE EDUCATION**

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This work interrogates the narrowing of the purposes of community college education to vocationalism, or job training, while neglecting or dismissing two broader purposes of higher education: personal and citizenship development. This study employs Michel Foucault's poststructural critique, using his conceptualizations of power/knowledge, discourse, subjectivity, and resistance, along with secondary texts, to explore the unexamined assumptions underlying the "truths" about community college education. The theoretical analysis deconstructs the discourse that drives specific practices to examine how power/knowledge relations create particular subject positions, or subjectivities, that serve the goals of certain groups while producing harmful effects for others. In addition, this analysis explores how points of resistance, in opposing the dominant "truth," disrupt power/knowledge relations. Using writing as a form of analysis, this study conceives of all players in the power relations of community college purposes as subjugated by certain knowledges. Each individual absorbs and enables the knowledges used by power to subjugate others, and/or the knowledges that make one subject to

the power, and/or the knowledges that oppose this state of subjugation. Therefore, each chapter of this work is organized by specific subjectivities that are created in power/knowledge relations and in the study of those relations. Poststructural theory and post qualitative methodology thus work together to offer one possible description of how practices and subjectivities are functioning either to keep power circulating or to disrupt it. This study also explores how poststructural practices of freedom can be used to restore all of the broader, historical purposes of community college education and to multiply subjectivities in beneficial ways.

## **Acknowledgments**

I wish to acknowledge my husband, Marty A. McNeely, for his love, patience, and encouragement during the many long hours, over 13 semesters, that I spent completing my coursework and writing this dissertation. Whenever I expressed doubt about my ability to complete this project, he always served as a calming influence, reassured me, and restored my belief in myself.

I am also grateful to my committee members: Dr. Alecia Y. Jackson, Dr. Damiana Pyles Gibbons, and Dr. Star P. Brown, three women of fierce intellect. They pushed me again and again to think differently—and better. Without a doubt, their guidance assisted me in crafting this work into something a million times better than it would have been without their input.

I also wish to acknowledge the support I received from dear friends and colleagues, especially Deborah Lonon, Debra Rose, Cindy Konarski, Michael Daniels, Lee Kiser, and Rusty Harrison, who were caring and supportive as always. My friend and colleague Mark Pellatt shared with me his vast knowledge of poststructural theory and helped me develop my own understanding and apply it to my topic.

I learned so much from all of my professors in Appalachian State University's Educational Leadership Ed.D. program, whose expertise and wisdom led me to develop not only intellectually but also personally and professionally. In particular, they inspired me to view my studies through a social justice lens that will forever impact the way I move through and respond to the world.

Finally, I thank my fellow students, the members of the Hickory 4 cohort. When I first began my program, I thought to myself, "I'm an independent learner. I don't need a cohort." I

was wrong. Being a part of this group inspired me, challenged me, kept me on track, and spurred me on. It was good to have people who understood, so they could rant, laugh, stress, and celebrate with me.

## **Dedication**

This work is dedicated to my husband, Marty A. McNeely, and to my parents – Suzanne Bartle Wright, Vincent G. Radaskiewicz, and Catherine Sabetto Radaskiewicz – who encouraged and supported me in so many different ways throughout my academic endeavors.



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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

*Each of my works is a part of my own biography.*

(Foucault, 1988, p. 11)

Like philosopher Michel Foucault, I believe that this work – my dissertation – is part of my own biography. My journey through higher education, which has led me to this doctoral program and to this research project, began in a Florida community college in 1981. Thirty-nine years ago, as a first-generation student from a lower socioeconomic family, I began taking college courses, and by 1987, I had earned an associate's degree, a bachelor's degree, and a master's degree. I was a liberal arts major, choosing to focus my studies on English (creative writing and literature) – which would today be considered a worthless, “dead-end” major – because I loved to read, write, and consider important ideas. I financed my associate's and bachelor's degrees with a combination of federal Pell Grants and loans that I repaid over the 10-year period following my graduation from the University of Central Florida. I got a job teaching high school English while completing my master's degree. My father paid my graduate school tuition. Eventually, I became a community college instructor, and today, I serve as an academic dean at a community college.

In all of those years of study at three different higher education institutions, I cannot remember anyone – a professor, an advisor, a staff member, a fellow student – ever questioning my academic choices as unrealistic or suggesting that I focus on more practical (i.e., job-related) studies instead. Consequently, I always felt as though I could imagine any future I wanted for myself. I felt as though I could adopt any goal I liked. I felt as though I could immerse myself in a discipline that fascinated me. In the absence of any constraints, I kept on going and

growing. I kept becoming, as I went, a professional, a lifelong learner, a patron of the arts, an engaged community member and citizen of our democracy, an advocate for social justice, and a person who is better and richer for all of her educational experiences.

I wish the very same for all community college students now and in the future. However, higher education has changed since the 1980s, and I fear that those students may not be so fortunate. They will begin their academic journeys saddled with the belief that the main – or even sole – purpose of their education is job training alone. They will be assisted along the way by many well-meaning community college employees who believe that helping lower-income citizens improve their socioeconomic status is the best thing we can do for them. Those employees will probably not question where that idea came from. And they will not realize its unintended consequences. Students will feel the constraints.

These current and future students are the reason that I needed to write this dissertation about the purposes of community college education. This research project arose from my close connection to a higher education institution that has been a significant part of my academic and professional lives for almost 40 years. During that time, I have been a community college student, graduate, instructor, academic dean, and student advocate. Once I became a *student researcher in a doctoral program* and a *theorist following Foucault*, I found myself both wanting and needing to explore how my own subjectivities, or “ways of being an individual” (Weedon, 1997, p. 3), have been formed in filling these specific roles. Achieving a better understanding of myself, however, was not my main goal. Instead, I wanted to show how community colleges can – and do – influence who and what people decide they are becoming.

An investigation into *who* people think they have become as a result of their educational journey requires an exploration of the current purposes of community college education, for

those purposes guide what happens in these institutions day to day. These purposes are shaped by a set of strategic conditions that establish and maintain certain “truths” within a network of power, and this network produces certain subjectivities (ways of being) and silences others. The goal of my study is to describe how power/knowledge relations produce the discourses and subjectivities that reduce community college education to job training and how points of resistance oppose that change. Just as Foucault (1982) said that it was not actually power but the individual, or *subject*, that was the focus of his own research, I am interested in understanding the subjectivities of community college students and community college faculty along with the lived effects of those subjectivities. This study is, from start to finish, about subjectivities: the specific subjectivities enacting the structural conditions that force others into certain subjectivities – and my own subjectivities shaping my approach to this inquiry.

Therefore, I am compelled from the outset to identify my own multiple subjectivities within the context I explore. The author of this dissertation is listed as just one person, an individual completing the final requirement of a doctoral program. However, as I completed this project, my *student*, *theorist*, and *researcher* subjectivities worked in concert with several other subjectivities to select my topic and bring this work to completion. They include the subject who was a first-generation college student at a Florida community college; the subject who is a graduate of a North Carolina community college; the subject who chose a liberal arts major (English) and then taught college-level composition and literature courses at community colleges in three states; and the subject who currently serves as an academic dean and student advocate. These various positionalities voiced different perspectives and concerns as I worked; in the end, though, they all came together in collaboration to produce this final product.

To provide a foundation for my exploration of the subjectivities involved in my study, I provide in the remainder of this introductory chapter a brief overview of the historic purposes of all forms of higher education and then focus on how these purposes have evolved over the 70-year history of one community college system in the state of North Carolina. Then, I go on to explain my purpose in conducting this study; provide my rationale for selecting a poststructural theoretical framework and a post qualitative, thinking with theory methodology; describe this dissertation's organization; and discuss the significance of my research.

### **The Purposes of Community College Education: Past and Present**

Since higher education was first established in the United States during the colonial era, it has had three broad, major purposes: (a) the personal growth of students, including intellectual, psychosocial, and moral development; (b) the “public good” or “common good,” which includes the development of an informed, engaged citizenry for the perpetuation of a democratic republic and for public service; and (c) the development of career skills (Cohen & Brawer, 1987; Dorn, 2017; Giroux, 2011; Rudolph, 1990; Turpin, 2016).

Studies have shown that higher education indeed fulfills these purposes and improves American society in myriad ways. Attending college has lasting, positive effects on *all* of the following outcomes: development of verbal, quantitative, and subject matter competence; cognitive skills and intellectual growth; psychosocial change; attitudes and values; moral development; educational attainment and persistence; career and economic growth; quality of life after college; and health (McMahon, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Community colleges, institutions of higher education established in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, were created to achieve this same set of broad purposes. The North Carolina Community College System, for example, began as a collection of public junior colleges that focused on academic

education rather than job training. By the late 1940s, junior colleges in Asheville, Wilmington, and Charlotte had been established to offer college transfer courses, and, in the case of Buncombe County Junior College in Asheville, pre-professional courses in subjects such as nursing, teaching, and aviation (Segner, 1974). Then, in 1947, the federal report *Higher Education for American Democracy* (1947) indicated that the United States' participation in World War II had increased interest in higher education and advocacy for community colleges, which would expand access to higher education for all socioeconomic classes and races. As a result, the U.S. could achieve goals such as decreasing racism and producing a more educated citizenry capable of understanding national and international issues and making informed decisions. This report made it clear that the purposes of community college education included individual and societal improvement: "Whatever form the community college takes, its purpose is educational service to *the entire community* [emphasis added]," which included the development of "individual talents at low cost and easy access" (p. 27). George Zook, the chairman of the federal commission responsible for producing this report, had earlier stated in 1941 that junior colleges should become "'the cultural leaders on a broad front in the communities in which they are located'"; these institutions, he said, should "'represent the highest expression of intellectual, esthetic, and cultural life in the community'" (Beach, 2010, p. 17).

North Carolina's educational and political leaders agreed; in fact, the 1957 Community College Act funded only "a limited curriculum consisting of courses at the freshman and sophomore levels in liberal arts and sciences," with no support at all for vocational training (1957 Session Laws and Resolutions, 1957, p. 1037). A 1956 Raleigh *News and Observer* editorial entitled "Must Be True Colleges" argued that, if the state's public junior colleges were



to help educate the growing number of students in the state, they must stick to academic programs, for these colleges were not “how-to-do-it schools” and should not be in the business of training in subjects such as cosmetology, plumbing, and sewing (p. 18).

Beginning in the mid-1950s, however, members of North Carolina’s State Board of Education, along with Governor Luther Hodges, began to advocate for expanding the state’s technical and vocational education programs. They argued that this training would increase the per-capita income of North Carolinians, serve the needs of business and industry, and attract new industry to the state. Their efforts paid off when, in 1958, seven postsecondary industrial education centers were established under the administration of the public school system (Segner, 1974; Wiggs, 1989). It would not be until 1963, with the passage of the Omnibus Higher Education Acts, that these industrial education centers were separated from the public school system and combined with the state’s junior colleges to establish a system of “comprehensive community colleges” (Segner, 1974, p. 82; Wiggs, 1989, p. 7) that has grown to include 58 colleges today. Thus, as North Carolina illustrates, the community college system has a long history of commitment to all of the historical purposes of higher education – not just providing occupational education but also serving society’s humanitarian and democratic needs by fostering individual growth and contributing to the common good (Bylsma, 2015; Giroux, 2011; Hanson, 2010).

Various studies show that community college education can and does foster civic agency and democratic engagement on campus and in the public sphere, as well as personal growth (Kisker, Weinraub, & Newell, 2016; McMahon, 2009; Mellow & Heelan, 2015). Unfortunately, though, these broader purposes of a community college education are becoming increasingly endangered. Although all three purposes of higher education continue to be vital to

today's society, one purpose – development of career skills – has been taking precedence over the other two, especially in community colleges (Dougherty, 1994). In North Carolina's community college system, for instance, occupational education has assumed a much more prominent role than it had when the first colleges were created in the 1940s. In fact, as recently as 1955, two members of North Carolina's Board of Higher Education stated that vocational education could not even be defined as higher education (Segner, 1974). However, just 65 years later, the main focus of many community colleges can now be characterized as vocationalism, "an educational philosophy or pedagogy claiming that the content of the curriculum should be governed by its occupational or industrial utility, and marketability as human capital" (Scott & Marshall, 2015, para. 1). This approach is evident in institutional mission statements; for example, Ayers's (2005) critical discourse analysis of the language of mission statements of 144 American community colleges revealed that many of these institutions view their role as economic developers who have ceded control of the curriculum to the market and who have reduced learners to "an economic entity" who exist to meet the needs of employers (pp. 539, 541-542).

This shift is troubling because community colleges are democratic institutions that contribute to equal opportunity for disadvantaged citizens and to economic and social mobility. If community colleges devolve into vocational schools where faculty are discouraged from being scholars and holistic educators, many American students from lower socioeconomic classes – who are as much society's current and future citizens and problem solvers as anyone else is – may be deprived of the experiences that advance the broader historical purposes of higher education. Students may fail to see their own potential or learn to think expansively about their future selves. They may not discover and/or develop their talents and abilities, which go to

waste. They may feel pressure to choose career fields that will limit their socioeconomic advancement in the future. When community colleges limit their purposes, they limit those students' potential and perpetuate social inequities.

### **Purpose of My Study**

As an academic dean and an educator for over 25 years, I am compelled to interrogate and disrupt the dominant discourse and practices that seek to narrow what were once three equally important purposes of community college education—personal development, citizenship development, and job preparation—to one main purpose (job preparation), with the other two broad, historical purposes largely ignored or dismissed.

I want to emphasize from the start that I do not object to job training in community colleges; on the contrary, I believe that the development of job skills is an essential and important part of the community college mission, and I am proud that our colleges help our students acquire the skills they need to improve their socioeconomic status for themselves and their families. What concerns me is what I perceive to be an ever-expanding silence about community colleges' role in broadly educating human beings to be successful in all spheres of their lives. Failure to be intentional about that purpose reduces community colleges to training workers and leaves individuals and society as a whole impoverished. Following Foucault, then, my intention with this research project was to introduce an “ethic of discomfort” about our current status quo. In so doing, I attempted

to criticize the present without anesthetizing those who must act within it, to make conventional actions problematic without portraying them as acts of bad faith or cowardice, to open a space for movement without slipping into a prophetic posture, to make it possible to act... (Rabinow & Rose, 1994, p. xxviii)

The purpose of my study is to describe the discourses, subjectivities, and points of resistance produced by power/knowledge relations that promote or oppose privileging vocationalism over the historical, broader purposes of American community college education. To accomplish this goal, I investigated the practices and the conditions of community college education that not only enable dominant discourses but also produce alternatives that open up new possibilities. My position as an educational researcher who operates *within* the structure I critique gives me daily access to and familiarity with the power relations, discourses, and practices that I analyzed.

In this poststructural, post qualitative study, I used a thinking with theory methodology (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012) within a poststructural theoretical framework to conduct a Foucauldian discourse analysis and to explore the following research questions:

- 1) How do power relations and practices produce knowledges about the purposes of community college education?
- 2) How do these relations produce and constrain subjectivities for community college students and community college faculty and other leaders?
- 3) What are the resistances within these relations of power?
- 4) How might these points of resistance create possibilities for new discourse and practices?

The result of this process is a conceptual dissertation in a non-traditional form. Chapter 3: The Subjectivities of Inquiry explains in more detail how I invented the methods that I needed as I blended theory, thought, and practices to generate new insights.

## **Summary and Rationale for a Poststructural Theoretical Framework**

Poststructuralism provided the best framework for investigating my research topic because the work of poststructural analysis is to challenge language and practices that have relied for so long on unquestioned assumptions and/or “common sense” knowledge that no one is aware of how they are serving the interests of specific groups and suppressing the interests of others (Weedon, 1997). The increasing vocationalism of community college education is a change that is taken for granted as acceptable, necessary, and beneficial. However, this change is actually a “political creation” produced by power relations and “generated in repeated heterogeneous practices and relations” (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 109). The analytic task of poststructuralism is “making the politics visible” (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 109) by describing the hidden ways of thinking that are driving what is said and what is done (Foucault, 1994a). Revealing these ways of thinking makes it easier to see who is benefiting and who is disadvantaged.

That is exactly what I hoped to accomplish by analyzing my own research topic using a Foucault-influenced poststructuralist framework. I examined the practices that limit the broader, historical purposes of a community college education to vocationalism alone. I was especially interested in the way power is responsible for subjectification, or the “making and unmaking of ‘subjects’” (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 70) and the silencing of other subject positions. In Chapter 3 of this dissertation, I explain in detail how I used poststructural theory to describe power relations’ tactics for constraining subjectivities in order to achieve certain goals.

Because subjectification can shape and limit what people believe they can become, I was also interested in how power relations produce points of resistance where educators contest the creation of these subjectivities. In doing so, I hoped to generate interest in reducing harmful

effects of subjectification by “unmaking” subjects and categories of people and confronting practices that are perpetuating social injustice (Jackson, 2013).

### **Appropriateness of a Post Qualitative Methodology**

I selected a post qualitative methodology – thinking with theory – because, like poststructuralism, this methodology rejects humanist methods that stifle creative thought, replacing them with a dynamic, experimental approach that involves reading extensively about a theory and writing about the new ideas that arise in thought when that theory is “plugged in” to a specific topic (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017, p. 728). Data arises, and collection and analysis of that data occurs, as the researcher moves back and forth between reading and writing; therefore, writing becomes the primary method of analysis. In this way, “we put theory to work to see how it functions *within* problems and opens them up to the new” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017, p. 721).

Using thinking with theory, I immersed myself in Foucault’s conceptualizations of power/knowledge, discourse, subjectivity, and resistance and then considered how these concepts illuminate the power relations involved in the determination of community college purposes. In Chapter 3: The Subjectivities of Inquiry, I explain my method in more detail.

### **Chapter Organization**

As I wrote earlier, my study is, from beginning to end, about subjectivities. Therefore, it is fitting for this dissertation to be organized according to key subjectivities that relate to my research project.

In this first chapter, my introduction, I have established my own multiple subjectivities that led me to select the purposes of community college education as the topic of my research project.

In Chapter 2: Subjugation, I review the literature on the rise of vocationalism and on three structural features of community colleges – neoliberalism, characteristics of community college students, and the community college as an institution with institutional leaders – that provide the structural conditions in which vocationalism is either promoted or opposed. In keeping with my focus on subjectivities, I explain how each of these features generates or resists subjugated subject positions.

In Chapter 3: The Subjectivities of Inquiry, I explore three of my own subjectivities – *theorist following Foucault*, *academic dean*, and *doctoral student researcher* – that led to my choice of a Foucault-influenced poststructural framework and a thinking with theory methodology, which impacted all of the decisions I made for this project as well as my analysis.

In Chapter 4: The *Future Worker* Subjectivity, I analyze specific practices at the national, state, and institutional levels – a speech delivered by President Barack Obama, the mission statement of a community college system, and a marketing message on a community college’s website – that adhere to the discourse of vocationalism to produce the *community college student as future worker* subjectivity. I also explore the lived effects of this subject position.

In Chapter 5: The *Workforce Developer* Subjectivity, I analyze again the practices in Chapter 4 along with additional practices of community college leaders and advisors to examine how these practices cleave to the discourse of vocationalism to produce the *workforce developer* subjectivity for community college personnel, particularly faculty. I also explore the lived effects of this subject position.

In Chapter 6: The *Agent of Challenge* Subjectivity, I explore the subjectivities that are silenced in the discourse of vocationalism and analyze how the *agent of challenge* subjectivity

embodies and enacts resistance through adherence to the competing discourse of comprehensive education.

Finally, in Chapter 7: Multiplying Subjectivities, I focus on my study's implications for educational leadership, exploring how community college leaders' practices can be altered to open up new ways of becoming for both community college students and faculty.

### **Significance of My Study**

My inquiry is significant because the scholarship is missing a poststructural perspective, which describes the “type of assumptions, of familiar notions, of established, unexamined ways of thinking [upon which] the accepted practices are based” (Foucault, 1994a, p. 172), to interrogate attempts to limit the purposes of community college education to vocationalism.

A poststructural framework provided me with the tools to deconstruct how and why one purpose of community college – job preparation – is being emphasized and privileged while broader, historical purposes are downplayed or marginalized. Using a thinking with theory methodology, I plugged in Foucauldian conceptions of power/knowledge, discourse, subjectivity, and resistance to conceive of this struggle in terms of how power harnesses “truth” (and vice versa) to achieve the goals of certain groups. This approach demonstrates a way of questioning accepted (but unexamined) practices that harm others, often unintentionally. An understanding of this process stimulates ideas about ways to resist and oppose it.

This study will be useful to educators who see the community college as a vital democratic institution and believe that we have a moral duty to resist efforts to reduce community college education to job training alone. My research yields insights about how to restore the discourse of comprehensive education, which conceives of *all* community college students as possible future innovators, problem solvers, decision makers, and change agents



whose experiences in higher education have provided them with not only with job skills but also the discovery of pathways toward a meaningful, satisfying life.

## **Chapter 2: Subjugation**

*All types of subjection are derived phenomena, that they are merely the consequences of other economic and social processes: forces of production, class struggle, and ideological structures which determine the form of subjectivity. (Foucault, 1982, p. 213)*

In Chapter 1, I introduced the idea that a vocationalist approach to community college education has been steadily growing in importance over the broader historical purposes of personal growth and the development of an engaged citizenry for our democracy. In this chapter, my review of the literature develops the argument that a vocationalist approach to higher education, which has become pervasive, brings disadvantages and social justice implications for community colleges. I posit that neoliberal economic theory is a structural condition that has facilitated the shift toward vocationalism. This new emphasis on job training is more pronounced in community colleges because of a second structural condition, these institutions' open-door policy and the resulting characteristics of community college students, who tend to be from low-income families. A third structural feature, the community college as an institution with institutional leaders, can—through social influence—either aid or hinder this focus on job training. My review of these structures establishes how they provide the conditions for the emergency of the power/knowledge relations of the purposes of community college education, which this study interrogates to reveal their underlying assumptions and harmful effects.

### **Structural Conditions and Subjectivities**

As Foucault stated in this chapter's opening quote, subjugation is derived, or made, by economic and social processes. In this section, I briefly discuss key concepts in poststructural theory to describe how the three structural features discussed in this chapter establish the

conditions for the emergence of power relations that narrow the range of available subjectivities to achieve specific goals.

By power relations, I am referring to Foucault's (1987) conception of power as the collection of all of the attempts to influence conduct, along with all resistance to those attempts, which arise from human relationships and cultural practices. The power relations that determine the purposes of community college education emerge from a combination of three essential ingredients: (a) the neoliberal ideology that is now pervasive in all of society's institutions, (b) the characteristics of the community college student population, and (c) the social influence of the community college's institutional leaders, who can either promote or oppose a neoliberal-influenced approach to education. The convergence of these three conditions generates a network of power in which a struggle over the community college's purposes can arise.

Within this network of power, competing discourses offer varying versions of "truth." For poststructuralists, a discourse is not what we say; it is a set of rules that dictate what is acceptable and "normal," what is "right" and "wrong." These discursive rules construct subjectivities, or subject positions—conceptions of who and what people believe they are. Individuals do not create subjectivities; they identify with, take up, and assume subject positions that were created in the varying discourses of social relations long before they were ever born (Weedon, 1997), and each subjectivity aligns with a certain "truth." This is why, wrote Foucault (1980), "The individual, with his identity and characteristics, is the product of power exercised over bodies" (pp. 73-74). In a higher education environment that emphasizes workforce development, the available subjectivities are primarily *worker in training* for students and *workforce developer* for faculty. Other subjectivities that higher education has historically

helped to develop, such as *community member* or *engaged citizen* for students and *holistic educator* or *social justice advocate* for faculty, are downplayed or ignored.

This process of subjectification, the “making and unmaking of ‘subjects’” (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 70), with “subjects” being culturally produced, invented categories for people, shapes and limits what people believe they can become. Subject positions also influence how individuals participate in power relations by either reproducing them or disrupting them (Weedon, 1997).

An emphasis on vocationalism in community college is made possible by a set of structural conditions that contribute to the production of certain “truths” within a network of power; however, it is not the conditions themselves that have the power to affect anyone’s decisions or behaviors. Power resides only within human relations (Foucault, 1978a), so any belief, ideology, or *-ism* (such as vocationalism and neoliberalism) is inert until it is *embodied* by the people who then enact them. Only then do these notions take on the ability to exert any control over others in relations of power and subjugate individuals.

Consequently, this review of the literature, too, is ultimately about subjectivities: the subjectivities that absorb and enable the knowledges used by power to subjugate others, the subjectivities that are made subject to the power, and the subjectivities that can either advance or oppose this process of subjugation.

### **Vocationalism: Past and Present**

Vocationalism – job training or career preparation – has been one of the historical purposes of higher education for hundreds of years. However, research indicates that, over the last five decades, a vocationalist approach has become increasingly dominant in higher education, even to the point of undercutting the other historic purposes. This change has been

traced back to 1967, when then-Governor of California Ronald Reagan pronounced that higher education should prepare students for jobs, and taxpayers should not be “subsidizing intellectual curiosity” (Berrett, 2016, p. 103). Politicians, however, were not the only ones objecting to broader education. Community college leaders and advocacy organizations such as the American Association of Community Colleges, too, contributed to the rise of vocationalism. In trying to ensure their own survival and carve out a niche for themselves in the higher education market, these groups shifted the community college mission from transfer education to vocational education (Bailey & Morest, 2006; Brint & Karabel, 1991; Dougherty, 1994; Hanson, 2010, 2013). Consequently, a recent poll reports that 47% of the general public say that the main purpose of a college education should be to teach work-related skills and knowledge, whereas 39% said that a college education should help an individual grow personally and intellectually (Pew Research Center, 2011).

Gradually, as higher education began to be viewed as a private asset rather than a public good, college students were increasingly viewed merely as “bundles of skills” to peddle in the labor market (Bylsma, 2015; Ford, 2017; Giroux, 2011; Hora, 2018). Hanson (2010) points to the U.S. Department of Education’s 2004 report *The 21st Century Community College*, which suggests that community colleges transform themselves into “engines of economic development” by becoming more responsive to labor markets through job training and giving employers input on the curriculum (pp. 57-59). In an analysis of U.S. Department of Education discourse on higher education, several studies have shown how the federal government now sees the primary goals of colleges and universities as achieving economic success and producing human capital for the needs of the market (George-Jackson, 2008; Jones, 2009; Suspitsnya, 2012). In addition, one critical discourse analysis of 144 American community college mission and goal statements

revealed that, in keeping with neoliberal ideology, these statements describe students as commodities who will be useful in business and industry's quest to remain globally competitive; these statements also assert unequivocally that the market – not the needs of individuals or society – controls curriculum decisions (Ayers, 2005, pp. 439). Another analysis of 165 issues of the *Community College Journal* (1960 to 2011) indicates that community colleges have been replacing their commitment to local democracy with a concern for global economic competitiveness (Ayers, 2013). According to Giroux (2014), "Universities and colleges have been largely abandoned as democratic public spheres dedicated to providing a public service, expanding upon humankind's great intellectual and cultural achievements, and educating future generations to be able to confront the challenges of a global democracy" (p. 18). Instead, community colleges in particular now focus on job preparation, and that is what everyone expects them to do.

Vocationalism does offer benefits, including the potential for upward mobility and for the elevation of citizens to a middle-class lifestyle (Bragg, 2001; Grubb & Lazerson, 2004), economic growth for communities (Bers, 2013; Grubb & Lazerson, 2004), and even stabilization of the local population (Helmick, 2005). These benefits have led to calls to renew emphasis on workforce training and development in community colleges, especially for low-income Americans (Jacobs & Dougherty, 2006).

Others defend the rise of vocationalism as a necessary and logical response to the evolving needs of American communities, especially employers' needs (Bragg, 2001). In the wake of job losses due to the 2008 economic recession, for example, many Americans were forced to focus on securing work that would provide financial stability while setting aside any goals related to self-actualization, such as personal growth and civic engagement.

Other research, however, has indicated that a vocationalist approach has serious drawbacks (Curtler, 2002; Giani & Fox, 2017; Grubb & Lazerson, 2005; Hora 2018). Programs that are preparing students for middle-class employment opportunities may include little or no discussion of the important integration of vocational or professional responsibilities and civic responsibilities; therefore, they may fail to prepare students for their important duties as citizens (Curtler, 2002; Grubb & Lazerson, 2005). Because of its narrow focus on job-specific tasks, a vocationalist approach may not offer students enough opportunities to develop the skills and qualities, such as critical thinking skills and adaptability, that are necessary for coping with rapid change in the workplace or in other spheres of life (Beach, 2010; Curtler, 2002; Hora, 2018).

Some educators and researchers have suggested that the limitations of technical programs can be addressed by enhancing them with academic elements that fulfill the broader, individual and civil purposes of higher education beyond workforce training (Bragg, 2001; Grubb & Lazerson, 2005; Harbour & Wolgemuth, 2015). However, even higher education programs that are now labeling themselves the “new vocationalism” and supposedly preparing students for transfer and additional education, rather than entry-level jobs, remain focused on job skills rather than broad education (Hanson, 2013). Furthermore, it is now more common to see the exact opposite of broad education: a significant push to promote short-term credentials, such as an 18-credit hour certificate program, or no credential at all. Hanson (2010) points to the U.S. Department of Education’s 2004 report *The 21st Century Community College*, which advocates that community colleges promote noncredit job training programs. Both of these options are devoid of any general education requirements at all.

Some research has correlated the completion of a certificate with higher earnings, especially in health care, and an increase in the probability that the individual is employed and

works in an industry related to his or her skills (Xu & Trimble, 2015). Other research, though, shows that short-term training does not deliver on its promises. One study by Giani and Fox (2017) on the impact of the vocationalist tactic of promoting short-term, “stackable” credentials (such as one-semester certificates) in American community colleges concluded that the workplace value of the short-term programs is questionable, and racial disparities surface during examination of students’ pursuit of additional credentials. In this study, Black and Latino students who completed short-term credentials in health professions pathways were less likely than their White and Asian counterparts to continue on to complete the longer-term programs that produced higher earnings. As a result, Giani and Fox (2017) question this strategy as one that, regardless of its good intentions, may actually be perpetuating socioeconomic inequalities.

### **Social Justice Implications**

Community colleges were created to ensure that all citizens would have access to an accessible, affordable education, thus contributing to equal opportunity and economic and social mobility for disadvantaged citizens. This review of the literature reveals that narrowing the purposes of a community college education endangers this vital democratic ideal.

If community colleges devolve into vocational schools, society as a whole could be deprived of the contributions of many Americans from lower socioeconomic classes because those people were deterred from fully discovering and/or developing their talents and abilities.

When resource allocations and various other policies and decisions support the neoliberal agenda, community colleges are often forced into complicity with powers that urge them to promote job training programs and downplay the other purposes of higher education by remaining silent about them or by reducing or removing activities that address these other purposes. The troubling result, according to critics, is a community college whose actual role is



to reproduce “the class inequalities associated with advanced capitalism” (Ayers, 2005, p. 528) by providing business with trained workers who will not question “the authoritarian work relations that capitalism demands,” by “ensuring that working class children inherit their parents’ social class position,” and by protecting selective admissions at four-year universities, especially the elite universities patronized by the wealthy (Ayers, 2005, p. 528; Beach, 2010; Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Dougherty, 1994, pp. 19-20). Rather than a “broad avenue of opportunity,” say some critics, the community college is in danger of functioning as a “cul-de-sac protecting class privilege” (Dougherty, 1994, p. 17). All of these outcomes are anti-democratic, and they represent the exact opposite of what community colleges were created to achieve.

In an environment where human beings are seen as nothing more than commodities for the labor market (Beach, 2010; Giroux, 2014), community colleges are being encouraged to abandon their commitment to equity. One study, for example, revealed that neoliberal policies can require community colleges to divert funds away from supports and services for low-income students and allocate those funds to achieve the state’s goal of training workers for economic development, thus forcing colleges to create structural inequalities that further disadvantage the already-marginalized, low-income student (Cox & Sallee, 2018). According to Brint and Karabel (1991), when community college leaders who were eager to gain influence in the higher education market began to “sort and track students along class lines primarily, diverting students from liberal transfer education into less prestigious vocational programs,” they were “rewarded by policy-makers and corporations for ‘managing the ambitions’ of students” (Meier, 2013, p. 8). These tactics undercut community colleges’ historical commitment to social mobility.

Intersectionality within lower socioeconomic classes – which contain a disproportionate number of races, ethnicities, and women – makes any limitation of higher education purposes

both racist and sexist as well. When these underrepresented groups are being tracked into low- and medium-skilled job training and not encouraged to pursue personal development and citizenship development, they are subjected to multiple forms of discrimination. Again, this outcome runs counter to the community college mission.

Therefore, when educational institutions focus on churning out workers for the labor market and limit the other purposes of higher education, they are in danger of aiding the exploitation and oppression of lower-class students – exactly the opposite of what most community college educators wish to achieve. When the ruling groups devise an educational structure geared toward technical and vocational training, they “deny the lower classes the kind of ‘general’ and ‘universal’ education necessary to attain positions of power and political leadership” (Fontana, 2002, p. 33). Avoiding this injustice requires a re-commitment to developing the potential of all students as future citizens, problem solvers, and critical thinkers who have the skills to challenge any system that benefits only the wealthy elite. According to Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci, “Democracy...cannot mean merely that an unskilled worker can become skilled. It must mean that every ‘citizen’ must ‘govern’” (as cited in Fontana, 2002, p. 33).

Addressing the potential injustices that stem from an emphasis on vocationalism in community colleges begins with an understanding of the structural conditions that establish an environment in which a struggle over the purposes of community college education arises.

### **Structural Features of Community Colleges**

How have some of the historic purposes of higher education, which were established centuries ago, come to be endangered in community colleges in such a relatively short period of time? Clues emerge in a review of three key structural features of community colleges: (a)

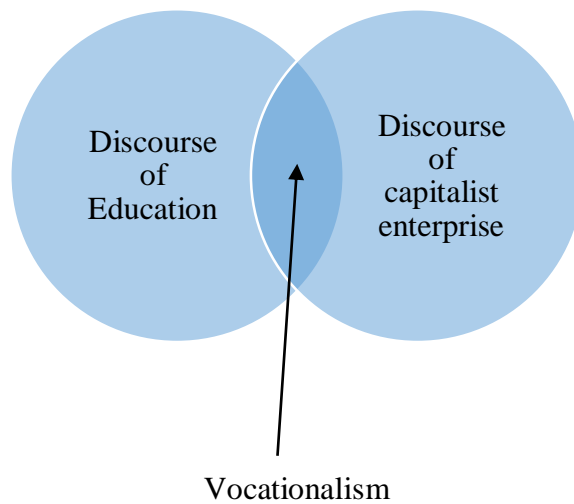
neoliberal ideology, (b) the open door policy and characteristics of community college student populations, and (c) the institutional nature of the community college and its leadership.

Although state community college systems are diverse because each one reflects the varying political, economic, and social conditions in its state (Dougherty, 1994), they all tend to have these three structural features in common. All of them predispose community colleges to acquiesce to external and internal forces in ways that are not always in the best interests of many of the state's citizens; the third feature, however, helps to maintain the conditions necessary for resisting detrimental change.

### *Neoliberal Ideology*

*Neoliberal ideology*, which is also referred to as “market fundamentalism,” “advanced capitalism,” “economic liberalism,” and “economic Darwinism” (Giroux, 2014) is an economic theory claiming that “if the markets are allowed to work without excessive government interference, and free of burdensome social spending, democracy will flourish, and the best social good for the greatest number of people will be achieved” (Bourassa, 2013, para. 1). Its major tenets include all of the following beliefs: (a) success and human happiness are defined solely in terms of productivity levels, profit, economic growth, materialism, and consumerism; (b) the sole purpose of government is to provide a favorable climate for business and industry; otherwise, government should refrain from interfering with capitalist enterprises; (c) market activity can solve society's problems better than governments can; (d) it is acceptable to move decision-making to unaccountable, private entities such as corporations, thereby limiting citizens' power to use democratic processes to create change; and (e) competitive individualism is preferable to community-oriented collaboration (Ayers, 2005; Bylsma, 2015; Chomsky, 1999; Giroux, 2011; Giroux, 2014).

Since the Reagan administration of the 1980s, this ideology has been influencing and transforming not only the economy of the United States but also its institutions, including all levels of education (Bylsma, 2015; Sullivan, 2017). Certainly, career development has always been one of the historical purposes of higher education. As depicted in the diagram below, community colleges have, for decades, been offering vocational programs and job training.



*Figure 1.* Vocationalism as the intersection of the discourse of education and the discourse of capitalist enterprise.

However, the overlap between the two circles is increasing in size as the neoliberal discourse of capitalist enterprise moves in, minimizes or eliminates other historical purposes, and bends education to its own aims by casting it in the role of workforce development.

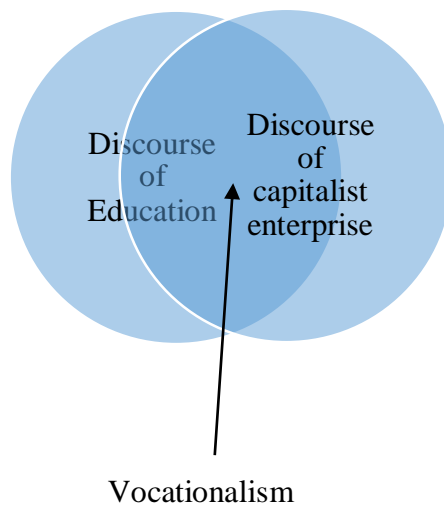


Figure 2. The annexation of the discourse of education by the discourse of capitalist enterprise.

As a result, the discourse of capitalist enterprise and commerce has been annexing higher education just as Foucault (1978a) wrote in *The History of Sexuality* that psychiatry “annexed the whole of sexual perversions as its own province” (p. 30). Other disciplines, too, such as biology, medicine, ethics, and pedagogy took up sex in their discourses. When this occurred, sex became an object whose “truth” could be revealed only by authorities and experts, all of whom with personal agendas and specific goals to achieve, who begin to pronounce what is “natural” and “unnatural” and take control of the subject (Foucault, 1978a). Similarly, a vocationalist approach to education continues to expand as the discourse of education allows itself to be infiltrated and overtaken by the discourse of capitalist enterprise.

Neoliberalism reduces the purposes of education to two: (a) human capital development; and (b) the maintenance of “military, defense, police, and legal structures and functions required to secure private property rights and to guarantee, by force if need be, the proper functioning of markets” (Ayers, 2005; Harvey, 2005, p. 2). These are the only reasons to allocate taxpayer

dollars for education. In public education at the primary and secondary levels, neoliberal policies have shifted power and control away from the key stakeholders (students, parents, teachers, and communities) and given it to corporations, politicians, and national foundations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. As a result, critical curriculum and assessment decisions are now made by unelected and unaccountable entities (Giroux, 2014; Henderson & Hursh, 2014).

Higher education, too, has been significantly influenced by neoliberal ideology and its emphasis on economic growth, materialism, and consumerism. Under neoliberalism, students are viewed as human capital and consumers; the rich avoid paying a fair amount of taxes and thus dodge their responsibility to contribute to social benefits and infrastructure; tuition and student debt increase; higher education faculty are stripped of their power; corporations determine the curriculum; and the development of critical thinking skills is eliminated out of fear that students will recognize and challenge their repression (Giroux, 2014; Winslow, 2015). Neoliberalism's assaults on higher education, says Giroux (2014), constitute "a sustained effort to dismantle education from the discourse of democracy, public values, critical thought, social responsibility, and civic courage" (p. 31). Individuals and society as a whole are impoverished as a result.

When the tenets of neoliberal ideology are embodied and enacted by government officials, capitalists, community college administrators, and the general public, the discourse produced in their power/knowledge relations creates subjectivities such as *job creators* and *job providers* (for employers), *workers* (for employees and students who are future employees), and *workforce developers* (for higher education faculty). By absorbing and enacting neoliberal ideology, these subjectivities subjugate themselves to an anti-humanitarian set of principles that

seeks to privilege the interests of the wealthy and powerful at the expense of people of lower socioeconomic status, to limit community colleges to vocationalism, and to undermine the community college mission and create the conditions for oppression and exploitation (Ayers, 2005). According to Sullivan (2017), “In some very unfortunate ways, we [in higher education] have become slaves to these ideas and this deified market model” (p. 168). Community college personnel, who are positioned to provide the training that capitalist enterprises need for their workers to operate in technologically advanced settings, are pressured by industry and by elected officials to emphasize job training rather than broad education. Because community colleges depend upon state and local government support, they often must acquiesce to these demands. Neoliberal principles may turn colleges into “economic engines,” but they also prevent them from serving as the “democratic engines” they were created to be.

#### *Community Colleges’ Open Door Policy and Characteristics of their Student Population*

Community colleges maintain an “open door policy,” which means that they accept anyone who has earned a high school diploma or its equivalent, with no additional entry requirements. As a result, they provide all citizens access to higher education and, thus, the opportunity to advance socioeconomically.

Not surprisingly, community college students tend to be members of more fragile populations. One analysis of community college enrollment showed that “students who enroll in community colleges are more likely to be low-income, the first in their families to go to college, and members of underrepresented racial or ethnic groups” (The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2011). National data on college enrollment and income shows that

44% of low-income students (those with family incomes of less than \$25,000 per year) attend community colleges as their first college after high school. In contrast, only 15%

of high-income students go to community colleges initially. (The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2011)

In 2011-2012, 38% of all community college students received a federal Pell Grant, which is awarded to students of lower socioeconomic status; however, the Pell Grant application rate was only 61%, indicating that many more students are eligible but do not pursue this source of funding (Community College Research Center, 2019). In fall 2015, a large proportion of the nation's non-white undergraduate students attended community colleges: 56% of Native Americans, 52% of Hispanics, 43% of African-Americans, and 40% of Asian/Pacific Islanders (American Association of Community Colleges, 2018).

Other research suggests that these students are being viewed as better suited to vocational programs that train workers for medium-skilled jobs. One study of 144 community college mission statements exposed these institutions' tendency to describe their own students as "an economic entity" whose purpose is to meet employers' needs or, even worse, as a dehumanized and collective "workforce" (Ayers, 2005, pp. 541, 544).

Students who are channeled into a vocational track experience lower educational and economic attainment (Dougherty, 1994; Hanson, 2010). According to one analysis, only 26% of the students who enroll in community college complete either an associate's or bachelor's degree after six years (Jacob, 2018) even though 81% of them initially identify a bachelor's degree or higher as their academic goal (Jenkins & Fink, 2016). Associate degree completion and transfer are even less likely for black, Hispanic, and low-income students than they are for higher-income and white community college students (Bailey & Morest, 2006). Various studies have indicated that the more "vocationalized" the community college is, the lower its transfer rate (Dougherty, 1994).



Dougherty (1994) contends that community college students' demographic characteristics, backgrounds, and academic preparation cannot account fully for this discrepancy between aspiration and achievement, and he argues that more structural factors are to blame. Bailey and Morest (2006) identify one of these factors as declines in state funding that lead to increased tuition rates, coupled with no corresponding increase in need-based financial aid. Another factor is students' academic, family, work, and personal problems that interfere with their goal attainment.

At the college level, Dougherty (1994) pointed to "institutional impediments" (pp. 84-85) that contribute to students' low success rates. These impediments include vocational program faculty and administrators who do not even mention the idea that their students continue their education beyond community college, as well as the "demoralization" of the college's liberal arts curriculum and academic programs that *do* encourage transfer, either by not promoting them or by downplaying their importance (Dougherty, 1994, pp. 95-96). Current research shows that lower-income students are already predisposed to enroll in job-training programs rather than liberal arts programs that may expand their sense of their own potential (Hanson, 2010). By offering only a limited vision of students' capabilities and options, community college personnel strengthen the likelihood that students will maintain a lower opinion of themselves and decline to think expansively about their life goals.

Clearly, when the knowledge that lower-income students are best suited for certain kinds of jobs is embodied by actors in the web of power relations, the beneficiaries subjugate themselves to a belief that places them in opposition to democratic ideals. In addition, a subordinate "workforce" category is created for community college students. The people relegated to this category have value to the other actors in the power network only in terms of

their potential economic contributions. This situation persists because the members of the subjugated group themselves embody and enact this knowledge. They choose to inhabit the *future worker* subjectivity by accepting that the purpose of their higher education is job training. They select a career path that may not fit their interests or talents. They limit the options for their lives and their sense of who they can become.

### *The Community College as an Institution*

The structural features of community colleges (adherence to neoliberal economic theory combined with an open-door admissions policy that results in a student body from disadvantaged populations) predispose them to accept a vocationalist emphasis in community college education. However, one additional aspect of their structure – their status as institutions – provides them with the means to oppose attempts to restrict their purposes. According to Selznick's (1957) influential *Leadership in Administration*, which scholars have continued to build upon for decades, institutions can be defined as “organizations infused with value” (p. 17), as opposed to other organizations, which are “a rational instrument engineered to do a job” (Selznick, 1987, p. 5). As such, community colleges employ institutional leaders, people who are responsible for “the promotion and protection of values” (Selznick, 1957, p. 28). This role differs from that of traditional organizational leadership and its focus on guiding, supporting, and providing feedback to subordinates (Washington, Boal, & Davis, 2008). Whereas organizational leadership “is based upon a notion of instrumental agency, hierarchical and charismatic power, and typically uses a future leaning vision,” institutional leadership “is based upon a notion of embedded or constrained agency, influence or negotiated power, and typically uses a backward-leaning vision meaning that the vision is there to remind the organization of the core values” (Washington et al., 2008, p. 720). In other words, an organizational leader such as the chief

executive officer of a company will use a system of rewards to motivate people to complete tasks that will achieve a desired future state, such as a minimum production goal or a financial goal. An institutional leader such as a college president, on the other hand, will influence his or her followers by appealing to tradition and collective values to build a sense of identity, meaning, and purpose that inspires their daily behavior and their desire to achieve the institution's goals.

In this context, institutional leadership is seen as a form of social influence (Ruben & De Lisi, 2017; Ruben & Gigliotti, 2016). Leaders achieve this influence by

creating and codifying new meanings that connect or resonate with people's emotional, psychological, and intellectual experience. These then become embodied in collective speech acts, which everybody accepts and understands, and which become established as a new kind of common sense. (Tietze, Cohen, & Musson, 2003, p. 4 of Chapter 8)

From the poststructural perspective, this is the idea that every society has "types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true" (Foucault, 1980, p. 131). Discourse establishes the rules about what is and is not acceptable to say, and people obey these rules. Community college administrators, for example, can shift the institution to a vocationalist focus by repeatedly emphasizing how the college's faculty and staff are engaging in meaningful work when they help lower-income students acquire job skills that improve their socioeconomic status. This message resonates with the college's employees, who will be persuaded that job training is the best that they can do for lower-income classes.

People accept and adopt this "common sense" not because they are forced to but because, according to Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony, they become convinced that their leaders are looking out for their interests, too, or that those who have attained leadership positions deserve those positions because they are naturally superior (Tietze et al., 2003). As a result,

the beliefs and values embedded in the talk of leaders come to be seen as the ‘right’ (and only) way to think, feel, and behave in the organization. Furthermore, they come to represent the organization, and become embodied in the activity of the organization, so that they form the base from which all organizational processes and practices come to be judged.” (Tietze et al., 2003, pp. 18-19 of Chapter 8)

Poststructural theory reconceptualizes this phenomenon as “normalization,” a tactic of control in power relations that involves creating and maintaining notions of what is “normal” and acceptable and what is deviant and unacceptable (Foucault, 1978a). In terms of vocationalism, job training that benefits local industry becomes what is “best” and “right” for students, and students who have other goals and dreams are seen as “unrealistic” or “impractical”—in other words, deviant from the norm.

Ruben and Gigliotti (2016) use the helpful analogy of the leader as a docent. Just as a docent in a museum or art gallery leads visitors through the various exhibits, directs their attention to certain things and not others, and offers messages that shape the ways the visitors interpret what they are experiencing and how they are interpreting it, institutional leaders serve a similar role. They do not control events, but they do influence, using various communication strategies, how their followers make sense of what happens. In carrying out this role, institutional leaders focus on three functions:

First, they manage the internal consistency of the firm (Selzick’s notion of commitment to the values and mission of the organization). Second, they develop external supporting mechanisms to enhance the legitimacy of the organization. Third, institutional leaders overcome external enemies. (Washington et al., 2008, pp. 719-720).

These functions, Selznick (1957) suggests, elevate the institutional leader to the level of a “leader-statesman” whose work is political (p. 37). In this study, I define leaders in the community college as not only those who have leadership titles, such as vice president, dean, or department chair, but also faculty, who serve in leadership roles in their classrooms and among their peers. They, too, are in the expert discourse of education and in the discourse of vocationalism; therefore, they are viewed as authorities by others.

The knowledges that institutional leaders embody affects whether they will uphold or oppose the subjugated positions generated by other structural features. If the latter occurs, they can propose and encourage different subjectivities that promote broader purposes of higher education. For example, rather than supporting and advocating for practices that put students in the subject position of *future workers*, the institutional leader can comply with discourses that produce *students acquiring a broad education that includes job skills*.

The community college’s status as an “institution” rather than an “organization” produces a key structural feature for re-asserting the ideal historical purposes of higher education. According to poststructuralism, “Social meanings are produced within social institutions and practices in which individuals, who are shaped by these institutions, are agents of change ... change which may either serve hegemonic interests or challenge existing power relations” (Weedon, 1997, p. 25). Thus, depending on the set of values they embrace and defend, bound to competing discourses in which they live out their own subjectivities, community college leaders can use discursive practices to encourage support for or rejection of attempts to narrow the purposes of their institutions.

## **Critique of Current Literature**

I designed this review of the literature, first, to establish the current state of affairs regarding the purposes of community college education and, second, to explore three structural conditions that are responsible for the power relations that struggle over these purposes. The literature clearly establishes the increasing emphasis on vocationalism in both two-year and four-year higher education institutions and concerns about the long-term impacts of this change (Ayers, 2005; Ayers, 2013; Beach, 2010; Curtler, 2002; Ford, 2017; George-Jackson, 2008; Giani & Fox, 2017; Giroux, 2011; Grubb & Lazerson, 2005; Hora, 2018; Jones, 2009; Suspitsnya, 2012). Thus, it identifies and describes the specific problem explored in my study. However, even though the literature establishes vocationalism as a problem, it does not problematize to reveal underlying assumptions, the groups that benefit, and the groups that are harmed.

In addition, the scholarship reveals the structural elements of community colleges that both promote and hinder changes to the historic purposes of community colleges. These elements include neoliberal ideology (Ayers, 2005; Bylsma, 2015; Giroux, 2014; Henderson & Hursh, 2014; Winslow, 2015), student characteristics (Ayers, 2005; Dougherty, 1994), and institutional status (Selznick, 1957; Washington et al., 2008). In this portion of my literature review, I show how these structures work together to undermine some of the historic purposes of community college education and to establish the conditions in which power relations emerge. However, none of the scholarship interrogates the structural conditions that have gone unquestioned in order to describe what they are producing. A poststructural study like mine deconstructs structures and practices to reveal these products.

Finally, the literature suggests the important role of community college leaders in determining the promotion of one set of institutional values instead of another (Ruben & De Lisi, 2017; Ruben & Gigliotti, 2016; Tietze et al., 2003; Washington et al., 2008). This portion of my literature review helps to establish how the knowledges and discourse of institutional leaders support or hinder the rise of vocationalism. However, there is a dearth of scholarship within any theoretical framework that investigates how community college personnel, who are operating in a neoliberal environment, preserve the role of their institutions as engines of social mobility, social equity, and democracy.

### **Dissertation Goals**

The purpose of my study is to use a thinking with theory methodology within a poststructural theoretical framework to provide not *the* explanation but one possible description of the power relations that determine the purposes of community college education. Foucault (1972) saw his work as a “project of a *pure description of discursive events*” (p. 27). Likewise, I see my project as mainly descriptive in nature. I sought to analyze the discourses underlying practices to uncover what they produce in power/knowledge relations. I was interested in the subjectivities produced in discourse, especially those that seek to limit what community college students believe they can become.

However, because the subjectivities being produced in power relations can be damaging to community college students in particular, I was mindful of Foucault’s (1982) later statement that “the role of philosophy is also to keep watch over the excessive powers of political rationality” (p. 210). By *philosophy*, he meant “critique” or examination of hidden assumptions, and by *powers of political rationality*, he meant “power,” or influence over the conduct of others. In other words, he believed that critique is about finding out what power is producing and

exposing any detrimental effects. I point out these detrimental effects as they arose in my analysis, not to cast blame but to provoke concern and stimulate interest in restoring co-equal status to all three broader, historical purposes of community college education: personal growth, the development of an informed and engaged citizenry, and career preparation.

In the next chapter, I explain the key concepts of Foucault-influenced poststructural theory, thinking with Foucault methodology, and Foucauldian discourse analysis that guided my research and impacted its outcomes. Readers will encounter explanations of the specific concepts and principles that gave me the tools I needed to examine the beliefs and assumptions underlying attempts to narrow the purposes of community college education to job training.



### Chapter 3: The Subjectivities of Inquiry

*One seeks a picture of the world in that philosophy in which we feel freest;*

*i.e., in which our most powerful drive feels free to function.*

Nietzsche (as cited in St. Pierre, 2000, p. 478)

In the introduction to this dissertation, I stated that my study is, from beginning to end, about subjectivity—including my own subjectivities that not only shaped my approach to this inquiry but also were produced *by* my analysis. Subjectivities, or subject positions, are particular ways of being that are socially and culturally produced and then made available – through discourse – for individuals to select from. Once we have temporarily taken up a positionality, we cannot help but filter our thoughts, observations, and experiences through it so that it affects how we perceive and react to the world around us.

My research was shaped by three specific positionalities that I inhabited during my work on this project: *theorist following Foucault, female academic dean at a community college, and doctoral student researcher*. This chapter explicates my study’s theoretical framework and methodology and describes how my multiple subjectivities guided all of the decisions I made in constructing and carrying out my analysis. In turn, these choices of theory and method produced the valuable insights I gained in my analysis. Foucault’s theory gave me, as Nietzsche put it in this chapter’s opening quote, the space in which “my most powerful drive feels free to function.” Foucault’s writings provided me with a “little tool box” (Patton, 1979, p. 115) that I used to assert important points about a topic that is deeply meaningful to me: the purposes of community college education.

In the sections that follow, I explain the key components of Foucault-influenced poststructuralism. Then, I address why, from the positionality of an *academic dean*, this theoretical framework is useful for both describing and functioning within power relations in community colleges. Finally, I describe how I used a thinking with theory methodology and Foucauldian discourse analysis to conduct my study from the positionality of *doctoral student researcher*.

### **Poststructuralism**

In taking up the *theorist following Foucault* subjectivity, I rejected the Enlightenment-inspired, humanist lens of modernism that has been pervasive in Western society since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. According to this viewpoint, which began with Reneé Descartes (1596-1650), George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), and Auguste Comte (1798-1857) and is still alive and well into the 21st century, we human beings can apply logic, reason, and empirical research to understand the “first principles,” “truths” and fundamental structures that order our world (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 494). We do not realize how firmly ingrained this mindset is until we are confronted with the radically different views of someone like French philosopher, professor, and historian Michel Foucault, who said that there is no ultimate truth to understand, only many different “truths” that are constructed in human societies and that ceaselessly compete for viability through the practices of people.

Shifting one’s thinking to embrace this idea can be difficult. Once I was able to do it, however, I found it impossible to understand the production of knowledge and the deployment of power in human relations in any other way. Therefore, I selected Foucault-influenced poststructural theory as the framework for my study. Foucault discussed his ideas in books, articles, and interviews from the early 1950s until his death in 1984. My study confines itself to

his views of power that he expressed in the late 1970s and early 1980s, which include *The History of Sexuality* (1978a), *Power/Knowledge* (1980), “The Subject and Power” (1982), and various interviews. In the next two sections, I define poststructuralism and then explain its principles and key assumptions that were integral components of my research.

### *Defining Poststructuralism*

Although the term *poststructuralism* does not have just one meaning, it is used to describe a collection of theories that “share certain fundamental assumptions about language, meaning, and subjectivity” (Weedon, 1997, pp. 19-20). These assumptions and concepts will be discussed in more detail in subsequent sections, but for now I will focus on the theory’s major propositions. Fundamentally, this theoretical position is a response to *structuralism*, which is itself difficult to define but can be thought of as “an approach to the study of human culture, centred on the search for constraining patterns, or structures, which claims that individual phenomena have meaning only by virtue of their relation to other phenomena as elements within a systematic structure” (Milner, 1991, p. 61). Structuralism claims that there are deep, fundamental structures that order our world, and human beings can discover these structures through the application of their powers of observation and their use of reason.

Poststructuralism posits that this way of trying to understand and order the world focuses on differences and divisions, and as a result creates classification systems, binaries, and rules that are not only limiting but also potentially harmful. Poststructuralism challenges humanist beliefs that individuals are stable, rational beings with free will who can discover true knowledge and absolute truths by applying their natural intellect. Instead, poststructural theory argues that knowledge is always tied to power, always bound to discourse, and therefore never free of politics. It argues that both truth and the very selves of human beings are constructed through

language and practices; and, because discourse produces a range of possibilities for who we can become, freedom and agency lie in our ability to both comply with and resist those norms.

Poststructuralism thus provides an alternative and “controversial account of our place in the world, which competes with conventional explanations” (Belsey, 2002, p. 5). These familiar explanations continue to exist, though, which is why the prefix *post-* in *poststructuralism* does not mean “after”; instead, it means “alongside” or “against.” This theory must persistently critique and disrupt humanism’s damaging “insistence on setting up boundaries, limits, and grids of regularity and normalcy” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 479).

For my study, I adopted the succinct definition captured in Weedon’s (1997) statement that poststructuralism is concerned “with the discursive construction of subjectivity, with the role of social institutions and the heterogeneous forms of power governing social relations” (p. 71). The following sections unpack this definition by explaining Foucault’s concepts of power/knowledge, discourse, subjectivity, and resistance within a poststructural frame. I tie these concepts to the overarching aim of my study in order to present a preview of the detailed analysis in later chapters. Specifically, I relate these concepts to efforts to narrow community college purposes to vocationalism and to efforts to keep those purposes broad.

#### *Key Principles and Assumptions of Poststructuralism*

My study relies upon Foucault-influenced poststructuralism’s key principles of power/knowledge, discourse, subjectivities, and resistance. In taking up the *theorist following Foucault* subjectivity, I put to work these concepts in my analysis of the discourses surrounding the purposes of community college education; thus, my analysis is grounded in these principles. To offer entree into these concepts and how I used a thinking with theory approach, I next give glimpses into the analysis to come.

**Power/Knowledge.** For Foucault (1978a), power is not a “thing” that can be held, seized, given away, or shared: “Power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are all endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society” (p. 93). Power is described as a relation: “When I speak of *relations of power*, I mean that in human relationships...power is always present: I mean a relationship in which one person tries to control the conduct of the other” (Foucault, 1997, p. 292). Exercising power, then, is nothing more than acting in ways that influence or modify the actions of others (Foucault, 1982, p. 219). What becomes visible in my study is how community college students are influenced to take up a *future worker* subjectivity and community college faculty are influenced to take up a *workforce developer* subjectivity.

Controlling others’ conduct, Foucault believed, does not require force, coercion, or domination. Instead, it requires getting people to adopt certain beliefs and see themselves in certain ways; once they do, they will act in accordance with power’s goals. Thus, power is inseparable from knowledge, and the two are wedded together in what is referred to as the “power/knowledge couplet.” As Foucault (1980) said, the relationship between knowledge and power is reciprocal: “...it is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power” (p. 52). The term *knowledge*, however, does not mean *truth*, as it does in the humanist viewpoint. For poststructuralists, all truth and knowledge are constructed in human beings’ social relations; therefore, there is not just *one* truth; in fact, the existence of any truth is called into question. According to Foucault (1980), “Truth is a thing of this world” (p. 131); knowledge is nothing more than what is “in the true,” or accepted as true (Foucault, 1981, p. 61). However, power/knowledge must limit the options to serve its aims. This involves constraining actions by constructing “a field of possibilities in

which several kinds of conduct...are available” or preferred (Foucault, 1994b, p. 139). This technique might involve, for example, remaining silent about certain options, as though they do not exist, or condemning certain options as unnatural or undesirable. What emerges in my study is that power/knowledge limits “truths” to neoliberal beliefs such as the most important purpose of college is job training. Those who accept these “truths” will govern themselves and regulate their own behaviors in ways that are consistent with the beliefs and self-concepts they have accepted as “truth.” This is why, according to Weedon (1997), knowledge and power are intertwined.

When certain “truths” benefit certain groups, those groups work to fix those meanings as acceptable and normal (Weedon, 1997). Neoliberal ideology, which I discussed in Chapter 2, pervades and subjugates all of society’s institutions, including higher education. Its “truths” are beneficial to groups such as capitalist enterprises that want publicly subsidized employee training in order to keep their operating costs down and profits high; local, state, and national level elected officials who need support for their reelection from capitalist enterprises and from voters; community college leaders who need funding for their institutions and employment opportunities for their graduates; and citizens and students who want affordable educational options that lead to opportunities for high-paying jobs and enhanced consumerism. By using mechanisms, such as normalization and dividing practices, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 of this dissertation, these groups work to influence taxpayer-funded public and post-secondary institutions and the citizens who are served by those institutions to accept these “truths” as what is “normal.” Accordingly, college personnel and citizens, too, adopt the dominant belief that the most important purpose of higher education is job training. They also do not question knowledges that are “subjugated” or excluded, which include the “truth” that community

colleges have broader purposes, such as personal development and citizenship preparation. In so doing, they fulfill the goals of the groups who promote certain knowledges to serve their own interests—even when they do so to their own detriment. Certainly, the power relations of community college purposes impact everyone involved in ways both large and small. They determine, for example, what is taught, what programs and activities are funded and promoted, what choices people make about the direction of their lives, and what people decide to believe about themselves.

The power/knowledge relations of community college purposes also illustrate four features of Foucault's conception of power/knowledge. The first feature is the ubiquitous nature of power: "Power is everywhere, not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (Foucault, 1978a, p. 93). Power relations, said Foucault, are "rooted deep in the social nexus" (Foucault, 1982, pp. 222). This is why power "reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives...*within* the social body rather than *from above* it" (Foucault, 1980, p. 39). In the struggle over community college purposes, everyone from students to college personnel to employers to government officials is involved and participating, sometimes doing the influencing and sometimes being influenced.

A second feature of power is that it is always on the move, circulating within and among the ever-changing practices of people:

Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. Individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application. (Foucault, 1980, p. 98)

Thus, power relations are never stable or fixed; instead, they are always changing and circulating depending on social relations of the moment: "...these power relations are mobile, they can be modified, they are not fixed once and for all...[they are] thus mobile, reversible, and unstable" (Foucault, 1997, p. 292). In the power/knowledge relations of community college purposes, people demonstrate varying levels of commitment to one view or the other. A particular faculty member, for instance, may one day feel enthusiastic about promoting the broader purposes of higher education, and the next day feel discouraged. Also, people sometimes do and sometimes do not choose to take some action; for example, a college staff member may or may not point out inaccurate data in a meeting with colleagues. In addition, people are at certain times influencing others' conduct and at other times being influenced to conduct themselves in particular ways. For example, an instructor who is committed to facilitating their students' creativity and intellectual development will also promote the college's vocational programs during recruitment events.

Yet, although power is "intentional" or goal-driven, it is also "non-subjective" or impersonal, too (Foucault, 1978a, pp. 94-95). It does not flow from the domination of one person or group or institution; instead, Foucault (1980) wrote, it "functions in the form of a chain," with many individuals responsible for its circulation (p. 98). Narrowing the purposes of community college education has occurred over time due to actions of many individuals; no one person or entity is responsible. Therefore, power is "neither inherently evil nor a negative, repressive force" (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 491). On the contrary, it is actually just the collection of all the actions of all people in the power network. Results arise incoherently from a mix of many different people pursuing their own personal agendas, and these individuals are often unaware of the effects of their pursuits. As Foucault put it, people "know what they do" and may even



“know why they do what they do”; however, “what they don’t know is what they do *does*” (as cited in Prado, 1995, p. 30). Therefore, my analysis refrains from ascribing malevolent or conspiratorial intent to the power relations I examine.

One final, essential characteristic of power/knowledge that guided my study is its productive nature (Foucault, 1978a). It produces discourse, subjectivities, and resistance (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016; Jackson, 2013; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). Each of these concepts is discussed in more detail, and within the context of the purposes of community college education, in the sections that follow.

**Discourse.** Power/knowledge produces and is sustained by discourse. Although the term *discourse* is commonly defined as “written or oral communication,” it has a different meaning for poststructuralism. According to Foucault (1991a), discourse is not what people say or think; discourse is composed of the rules that we obey when we speak and think. Discourses are “*socially produced forms of knowledge* that set limits upon what it is possible to think, write, or speak” about something (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 35). These are rules that “allow certain statements to be made and not others” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 485), and they are, said Foucault (1991a), unconscious and “unexamined” (Foucault, 1994a, p. 172), so we ourselves do not know where they came from, what they really mean, what they produce, or why we affirm them and pass them on (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016).

Throughout this dissertation, I refer to the “discourse of vocationalism” and the “discourse of comprehensive education.” The discourse of vocationalism includes all of the rules that govern what is said and not said in support of privileging the job training purpose of community colleges. Based on the tenets of neoliberal ideology, which I discussed in Chapter 2, these rules include the beliefs that human success is defined in terms of financial wealth and

ability to participate in a consumer culture and that competition among individuals is preferable to collaboration. The rules of the discourse of comprehensive education include the beliefs that human beings are much more than workers and that colleges have a moral duty to broadly educate citizens.

Discourses that arise in a particular time and place produce “representations of the world” (Cheek & Gough, 2005, p. 303). Each one gives the world a particular meaning or interpretation, a version of reality that serves particular interests (Weedon, 1997). As these different discourses contradict and compete with one another, they generate differing realities, differing subject positions, and differing knowledges (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016; St. Pierre, 2000; Weedon, 1997). The discourse of vocationalism offers a particular worldview that serves the interests of capitalist enterprises and government, whereas the discourse of comprehensive education promotes the interests of citizens and educational institutions. Consequently, the two are in constant competition.

Discourse also “transmits and produces power” (Foucault, 1978a, p. 101) in ways that have profound material, economic, and social effects (Foucault, 1980). With this aspect of discourse in mind, my analysis of practices in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 includes an explanation of how students and community college personnel, especially faculty, are affected by the competing discourses involved in determination of community college purposes. These effects can include a failure to develop one’s talents and a decrease in ambition that lowers achievement levels.

At the same time, though, discourse also “undermines and exposes it [power], renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (Foucault, 1978a, p. 101). This is why poststructuralism analyzes discourse and the practices of people “not for their truth value or inherent meaning, but for the ways in which they disrupt or sustain relations of power and

advance knowledge” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 57). This type of analysis reveals the power network. Accordingly, my study examines practices, such as mission statements, marketing messages, and advising practices, to determine how they support or undermine relations of power related to the purposes of community college education.

**Subjectivity.** It is in discourse, within relations of power, that subjectivities are produced. The term *subjectivity*, or *subject position*, is another key concept in Foucauldian-influenced poststructuralism. My study adheres to Foucault’s (1982) conception of the *subject* as having two meanings; the first is “tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge” (p. 212), or, as Weedon (1997) put it, subjectivity is “the conscious and unconscious thoughts and motions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world” (p. 32).

The second meaning is “subject to someone else by control and dependence” (Foucault, 1982, p. 212). This meaning arises from the poststructural belief that we do not create our subject positions. Because we are born into a socially constructed world, subjectivities pre-exist us, “individuals are always-already subjects” (Althusser, 1971, p. 176), and “we take up or resist certain subject positions that are already available discursive formations operating within cultures and are obliged to work within the confines of those positions” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; St. Pierre, 2000, p. 502). A subject, therefore, “constructs itself by taking up available discourses and cultural practices” but at the same time “is subjected, forced into subjectivity by those same discourses and practices” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 502). This dissertation demonstrates how this process occurs in the struggle over the purposes of community college.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 focus on three particular subjectivities that arise from two competing discourses. The *community college student as future worker* subjectivity and the *workforce*

*developer* subjectivity are both produced within the discourse of vocationalism. The *agent of challenge* subjectivity is produced within the discourse of comprehensive education. All three have had certain “truths” imposed upon them by the power relations in which they arose. Thus, they illustrate Foucault’s (1980) belief that “it is already one of the prime effects of power that certain bodies, certain gestures, certain discourses, certain desires, come to be identified and constituted as individuals...The individual is an effect of power” (p. 98). In other words, in understanding one’s self, the subject is made to comprehend what he or she does and says according to power’s prefabricated notions of what he or she is.

Yet, because power/knowledge relations are always shifting, subjectivities are not fixed but unstable and constantly changing, and subjects can exchange one for another as they move through different social contexts. In one setting, an individual may take up a certain subjectivity and then shift to a different subjectivity in a different setting. For example, a community college faculty member can shift from the *workforce developer* subjectivity to the *agent of challenge* subjectivity, and back again, depending on the context. Because “subjects are in a continual process of constructing and transforming their selves and their worlds through their interactions with others” (Jackson, 2013, p. 841), subjectivities are “precarious, contradictory, and in process constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak” (Weedon, 1997, p. 32). The fact that subjectivities are not only fluid but also multiple (Davies & Gannon, 2005; Weedon, 1997) means that no one has to remain stuck in one way of being, and alternatives are always possible. These characteristics of subjectivity informed my discussion, in Chapter 7, about how subject positions can be multiplied to open up new possibilities.

**Resistance.** Finally, opposition to the discourses and subjectivities that are formed in power/knowledge relations produces resistance. Foucault said that power relations include

“innumerable points of confrontation, focuses of instability, each of which has its own risks of conflict, of struggles, and of an at least temporary inversion of power relations” (Foucault, 1979a, p. 27). These “points” where “discourses are transformed in, through, and on the basis of the relations of power” (Foucault, 1980, pp. 69-70) are places for resistance. They are multiple and diverse, scattered throughout the network of power, and they are unpredictable,

...distributed in irregular fashion: the points, knots, or focuses of resistance are spread over time and space at varying densities, at times mobilizing groups of individuals in a definitive way, inflaming certain points of the body, certain moments in life, certain types of behaviors.” (Foucault, 1978a, p. 96)

In the power/knowledge relations related to the purposes of community college education, points of resistance are embodied and enacted by individuals and groups that oppose privileging a vocationalist approach to education over other, broader purposes. Occasionally, these dispersed resistances are gathered together and organized to form a larger-scale opposition to power; typically, though, they are “daily, ongoing practices” at the local level (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 493). They occur in classroom activities, interactions between colleagues, conversations between faculty and students, and so on, and they force power relations to change (Foucault, 1997). This understanding of how resistance functions informed my analysis of practices in Chapter 6.

### **Freedom and Agency**

According to Foucault, power is impersonal (Foucault, 1978, p. 94), exercised by all, and not an “inherently evil nor a negative, repressive force” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 491). That does not mean, however, that it may not have harmful consequences. In *The History of Sexuality* (1978a), Foucault pointed out power’s damaging effects on women, children, and homosexuals. Subjectification “makes up” the categories of people it describes and brings those categories into

being when they do not really exist (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 71). This process creates “lived effects,” or ways that influence people’s sense of themselves and their behaviors (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 69). Subjectification can shape and limit what people believe they can become, especially when they are aware of a “stigmatized and subordinate subject position” that has been created for them to inhabit (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, pp. 77, 81). As I established in Chapter 2, power/knowledge creates “truths” about community college students that normalize certain beliefs about them. Thus, a vocationalist approach to their education seems normal and natural, but these “truths” cast them into subordinate subject positions that can be detrimental to their lives.

My new awareness of this potential damage to community college students, which was generated in my study of poststructuralism, produced an intersectionality between my own *theorist following Foucault* subjectivity and my *academic dean* subjectivity. In the latter subject position, I have adopted certain values and priorities, including a moral obligation to advocate for students’ best interests and to protect them from harm. When my study of Foucault’s work revealed to me how power/knowledge relations can produce exploitation and oppression, it became important for me, as a dean who advocates for students, to interrogate the assumptions underlying everyday interactions, decisions, and practices. My *academic dean* subject position gives me the opportunity to participate in practices that tie directly to my research topic. Consequently, I chose to conduct a Foucauldian critique and to question the unexamined ways of thinking that are producing not only accepted practices but also the resistances that reveal those practices’ unhealthy or unjust effects.

Going into this project, I knew that, regardless of its quality, it would never result in total eradication of inequity or injustice. I accepted the poststructuralist contention that “we are not

born free; we are born into relations of power from which we cannot escape” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 492). Therefore, complete liberation from this network of power is not possible for any of us. However, this does not mean that we are without recourse.

Poststructuralism conceives of a different kind of freedom. “In poststructuralism, ‘all categories are unstable, all experiences are constructed, all reality is imagined, all identities are produced, and all knowledge provokes uncertainties, misrecognitions, ignorances, and silences’” (Britzman, 1993, p. 22). This means that we can question and resist them all. Freedom, then, is a “constant ‘civil disobedience’ within our constituted experience...”; it lies in “rebellious against those ways in which we are already defined, categorized, and classified” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 492). In other words, freedom is “ongoing resistance to how we are being constituted and are constituting ourselves as subjects” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 492). In exercising this freedom, we do not create change in one massive shift, like a huge destructive earthquake, but gradually, over time, as those of us within the structure constantly critique and question to open up other possibilities. With smaller rumblings and jolts, we create new awareness and, hopefully, new interest in repairing whatever is limiting the possibilities of those whom we serve.

This different understanding of freedom requires a new conception of agency. For poststructuralists, agency is “not understood...in terms of an individual standing outside or against social structures and processes”; instead, agency involves recognizing the power of discourse and realizing one’s ability to “create new life-forms, life-forms capable of disrupting old meanings...even potentially overwriting or eclipsing them” (Davies & Gannon, 2005, p. 319). We may not have created the reality into which we were born; however, we do have the choice to go along or to change it. Poststructural theory assures us that whatever is socially constructed can be called into question (Davies & Gannon, 2005).

Thus, one important form of agency is to utilize poststructuralism's research method. It is through analysis or "critique," said Foucault (1994c), that "the subject gives himself the right to question truth on its effects of power and question power on its discourses of truth" (p. 266). From my positionalities as a *theorist following Foucault* and a *community college dean*, I gave myself the right to employ Foucauldian critique to uncover the deep-seated assumptions underlying the status quo and to describe the points of resistance where people are struggling against attempts to limit and subordinate them.

### **The Benefits of Poststructural Inquiry in Educational Research**

Poststructural theory was the best choice for my inquiry into the power/knowledge relations produced by the discourses of community college purposes. First of all, this theory offers a deconstruction of human relations within educational institutions. Like any organization where a large-scale network of power/knowledge relations is constantly on the move, a community college is a place that is perpetually producing "truths," subjectivities, discourses, and resistances that compete with one another for political gain. Poststructuralist perspectives help educators better understand how and why this production occurs, which is the first step toward recognizing and correcting deleterious effects. Elimination of these negative effects can occur only with corrections at the structural, or institutional, level—rather than the individual level. Community colleges are influential institutions in our society, capable of achieving not only great good – by contributing to beneficial growth and self-actualization – but also great harm – by perpetuating structures that promote notions of what is "normal" in order to marginalize and to perpetuate inequalities. Therefore, it is critical that we dismantle these structures when they are found to be harmful.



Poststructuralism is also beneficial to educational inquiry because its goal, which is to figure out “how to create more fluid, open conditions – or becoming-spaces – within which people can transform themselves” (Jackson, 2013, p. 846), aligns with the goals that educators have probably (and hopefully) already set. We want every one of our students to reach their highest potential and develop their knowledge, talents, and skills so that they can make positive contributions to their communities and live satisfying lives. Because poststructuralism critiques deficit-oriented perspectives at the level of the individual, we keep our focus on confronting and removing any socially constructed barriers that stand in their way of doing so.

In addition, poststructuralist theory is useful for educational inquiry because it encourages educational leaders, rather than those outside the educational system, to conduct these analyses. Educational researchers are themselves *within* the structure that they critique. They are immersed in its power relations and its practices. We cannot stand *outside* a structure to oppose it (Davies & Gannon, 2005); we must operate within it. As a community college dean, I am affected by (and affect) the purposes of community college education every workday, so I am an expert witness on what is happening.

If we take seriously our poststructural critique of “foundationalism, absolute knowledge, a single truth, power, a transcendent rationality, a subject defined in advance of living, etc.” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 506), we can expose and confront those practices that are perpetuating social injustice (Jackson, 2013). That is exactly what I hoped to accomplish by analyzing my own research topic using a Foucault-influenced poststructuralist framework. I examined the practices that limit broader, historical purposes of a community college education to vocationalism alone. I was especially interested in the way power is responsible for *subjectification*, or the “making and unmaking of ‘subjects’” (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 70), with “subjects” being culturally

produced, invented categories for people that are productive in that they create what they seem to describe, bringing particular kinds of subjects into being that would otherwise not exist.

Community college personnel, for example, are lauded for serving in the role of *workforce developers* and producing graduates who have conformed to neoliberal discourse by taking up the potentially limiting subject position *workers who fulfill business and industry needs*. Students who are interested in disciplines, such as art or psychology, that do not have a direct, linear connection to local business and industry needs, are cast into the category of *impractical or useless majors*.

I was also interested in how the power relations of community colleges can ignore certain subjectivities to silence them. In an environment where the goal is to produce *workers*, there is little or no mention the other important roles, such as *community member* or *engaged citizen*, that higher education has historically helped to develop.

Subjectification can shape and limit what people believe they can become, especially when they are aware of the “stigmatized and subordinate subject position” that has been created for them to inhabit (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, pp. 77, 81). This is why I was particularly interested in how power relations produce points of resistance where educators contest the creation of these subjectivities. Where are these points located? How do they work to disrupt and dismantle harmful knowledges, subjectivities, and discourses? How effective are they in forcing changes in power relations? Can they be multiplied, activated, supported, organized, and emboldened? These are the questions I explored in my research.

### **Method: Foucauldian Critique and Thinking with Theory**

My third subjectivity that guided and influenced my inquiry – in addition to *theorist following Foucault* and *community college dean* – is *doctoral student researcher*. It is from this

positionality that I sought to describe what is currently unexamined about the power relations that shape the purposes of community college education, with my first goal being deconstruction, and my second goal being to open up new possibilities that power has sought to exclude. From this subject position, I functioned in the role that Foucault called an “intellectual” (Foucault, 1980, p. 133), whose job is to discover how something became acceptable by analyzing the power/knowledge relations that made it so (Foucault, 1994c). My intention is best expressed by Prado (1995), who wrote,

Intellectuals resist regimes of truth not by constant and detached creation of new ones, but by deliberately and internally countering what power achieves blindly when it establishes new regimes of truth. (p. 114)

In other words, I did not set out to criticize or assign blame to particular entities, which is impossible when power relations are the collection of many actions and activities. Instead, I describe what impersonal power produces and examine its effects.

For poststructuralists, contesting dominant meanings involves *deconstruction*, a type of poststructural critique that makes “visible how language operates to produce very real, material, and damaging structures in the world” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 481). Foucauldian critique is a kind of deconstruction that involves interrogating language and practices. It is based on the poststructural belief that, in our quest to order our social reality, our language constructs “categories, binaries, hierarchies, grids of intelligibility based on essences...that reward identity and punish difference” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 484). Based on our individual experience or our collective social experience, we create “norms” based on what seems to us to be natural or right and call them “truth” (Weedon, 1997). Then, we pressure each other to conform to these norms, and we deem anything that does not fit to be abnormal or wrong (Weedon, 1997). In so doing,

we privilege that which conforms to the norms over whatever does not conform by using language to create structures (the binaries, categories, hierarchies, and so on) that can be damaging – physically, emotionally, psychologically, mentally – to those who do not fit (St. Pierre, 2000). For example, my study reveals that a student who selects what has been pronounced an “impractical” major will feel pressure to conform to the “norm” by switching to a “practical” major. The result may be huge expenditures of time, money, and effort in pursuing a goal that does not bring a sense of meaning or satisfaction.

Foucauldian critique is a process of *defamiliarization* that can be uncomfortable because it involves calling these long-standing concepts and categories into question. The goal, said Foucault (1994a), is to discover, first of all, “on what type of assumptions, of familiar notions, of established, unexamined ways of thinking the accepted practices are based” (p. 172). Some of these assumptions that my study makes visible are the notion that the most important purpose of higher education is job training and the belief that community college students are best suited for low- to medium-skilled positions in the workforce. Once we expose these assumptions, we consider whether they have deleterious consequences (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016).

This form of critique asks us to consider the idea that what we have thought of as normal might be the result of a political battle (McWhorter, 2005; Weedon, 1997). Experience can be interpreted in so many different ways that those who wish to maintain certain norms must ceaselessly maintain and promote them (Weedon, 1997). This reality also opens the door for those who wish to contest those norms and construct new, alternative meanings (Jackson, 2001).

Foucauldian critique’s deconstruction of these norms cannot be achieved using conventional research methods. I must agree with poststructuralist researcher St. Pierre (2019),

who unequivocally rejects all pre-determined methodology because it is incommensurable with poststructural ontology and epistemology:

There can be no post qualitative research methodology or research methods, no post qualitative research designs, no post qualitative research practices, no post qualitative data or methods of data collection or methods of data analysis, no representations of a stable, sensory “lived” world, no post qualitative findings, no post qualitative research report format... (p. 8)

The unique “onto-epistemology” of poststructuralism requires emerging forms of post qualitative inquiry, so I chose thinking with theory as my method. Thinking with theory is inquiry within a post qualitative frame that replaces standardized qualitative methods with a new “process methodology, one that gives up static properties of linear method and even cyclical, iterative stages and procedures of conventional qualitative data collection and analysis, *in favor of dynamic becomings and generative differentiations*” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017, p. 719, emphasis added). In other words, it rejects humanist methods that stifle creative thought, replacing them with a generative approach that involves reading extensively about a theory and writing about the new insights that become emergent when that theory is “plugged in” to a specific topic. This involves considering one’s topic “in light of the concepts or theories or lives of other sources and then thinking about what arises” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017, p. 728).

According to St. Pierre (2018), there is no recipe for post qualitative inquiry. On the contrary, it calls for experimentation and invention of one’s own approach (St. Pierre, 2018). I explain my approach here only to offer one example of how it can be done. Whatever this invention looks like, though, it does not separate theory from data collection from analysis. All three work together. According to Jackson and Mazzei (2012), as the researcher thinks within a

theoretical framework, “a constitution and emergence of the data and concept” occur simultaneously, and they work together (p. ix). The one constant throughout the limitless possibilities is writing, for “writing is analysis” (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 21).

I think of my approach as composed of hundreds of different encounters with different aspects of my research process, including my research topic, the theory I studied, and practices I analyzed (texts and actions). To explain the research approach that I invented, I tell two stories of specific encounters I had: one encounter with theory and one encounter with a practice. Each one illustrates how that one piece led to connections to the other pieces, with the result being an ongoing evolution of thought. With each new movement from one piece to the next, I produced new insights and added to the new mental construction I was building to show how the theory was in the practice and the practice illustrated the theory.

The first story begins with an encounter with theory during a meeting with a colleague who had just written an award-winning dissertation from a poststructural theoretical framework that focused on the work of Judith Butler and Gayatri Spivak. She had agreed to read and discuss Foucault with me during the summer of 2019 so that she, too, could learn more about his work. When we met for the first time in June, we had both begun reading Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality* (1978a), and she was also reading Sara Mills’s (2003) book *Michel Foucault* alongside it. During our discussion, my colleague and I discussed Mills’s explanations of power/knowledge and subjectivities, especially as they relate to community college students and faculty. I mentioned that, because my topic—the purposes of community college education—is really about people and how they are affected by these purposes, I was already envisioning an organization pattern for my analysis that focused on one particular subjectivity per chapter. My colleague suggested that *every* chapter of my dissertation could address a different subjectivity,

including my own subjectivities as the researcher. I was immediately intrigued by the idea but also uncertain about how I would discuss my literature review and my chapter about theory and method in terms of subjectivities. However, I kept an open mind as I went to work exploring the idea.

First, I read Foucault's discussions about subjectivities in "The Subject and Power" (1982), *The History of Sexuality* (1978a), and *Power/Knowledge* (1980). I also read Weedon (1997), St. Pierre (2000), and others on the subject. As I read, I encountered Foucault's concepts of subjugation and freedom in "The Subject and Power" (1982) and *Power/Knowledge* (1980) and in Prado (1995), and I thought about how these concepts applied to the structures I discussed in my literature review. When I wrote the first draft of that literature review for a class assignment during the fall of 2018, I had decided that the topic of my dissertation would be the purposes of community college education, but at that time, I still believed that critical theory would be my framework, so I conceived of the structural conditions as "factors" that were causing the problem. When I shifted to a poststructuralist perspective, I realized that these structural conditions work together to create the environment in which power/knowledge relations can emerge. I reflected on and wrote about Foucault's (1978a, 1982) thoughts on how beliefs must be "embodied" if they are to be manifested in the world, which led me to realize that people subjugate themselves to certain ways of thinking and embody them in ways that lead to the subjugation of others.

This led me to search my memory for specific practices that illustrate this. When I thought of meetings with colleagues and conversations with students and advisees, I wrote about those interactions in my journal. I also searched for videos and transcripts of interviews and speeches that demonstrate how leaders who have adopted a neoliberal mindset pass on "truths"

about the world that can be harmful to others. In this manner, I continued to move back and forth between the different pieces—theory, topic, and structural conditions or practices—and each time I moved and wrote, my thought evolved as I made a new connection or gained a new insight. With each evolution, I assembled my own mental conception of how the power/knowledge relations of community college purposes functions.

I also recognized how I myself play a role in this process of being subjugated and then subjugating others, which propelled me back to Foucault (1978a, 1982) and secondary sources, such as Weedon (1997) and St. Pierre (2000), for explanations about multiple, fluid subjectivities; one's complicity in what is being critiqued; and the practices of freedom, especially stepping back and reflecting on one's own subjectivities to recognize them. My colleague's one suggestion in that June meeting was a spark igniting a months-long explosion of new insights that ultimately led me to view my topic, the practices I analyzed, and the organization of my entire dissertation using a subjugation-to-freedom conceptual framework. By beginning with one key concept of the theory, I created an innovative way of looking at what happens in the struggle over community college purposes.

My second story begins with a practice. In March 2019, I was in a meeting for the purpose of planning an open house-style event designed to boost enrollment by informing local high school students and their parents about the college's programs of study and encouraging them to enroll. During the discussion, one of the four expressions that I analyze in Chapter 5: The *Workforce Developer* Subjectivity – “The purpose of education is to get a job” – was uttered, as it often is in a variety of settings. In addition, someone mentioned that university graduates were returning to community colleges to obtain training that leads to employment. This assertion about a supposedly widespread phenomenon, which I discuss more fully in



Chapter 5, is not supported by data, yet it is shared as a fact. When I spoke up to suggest that we also needed to share the benefits of a transfer degree for students who plan to pursue a bachelor's degree (which is one of the functions of a comprehensive community college), the brief silence that greeted my remark told me that I had been unaware until that moment of the event's main goal: to connect young people to two-year training programs to prepare them for local jobs.

I remember feeling very angry in that meeting. It seemed exploitative to me to see higher education recruitment as steering kids toward serving the needs of local employers rather than encouraging these young adults to discover and develop their interests and talents. It felt as though these prospective students were being viewed as commodities. I wrote about this meeting and my reaction in my journal. As a post qualitative researcher, I strived to “live the theories” (St. Pierre, 2018, p. 604) by paying attention to specific practices – my own and others’ – that I encountered in my daily life. So, from February 2019 to December 2019, I kept a journal and recorded field notes about the practices I encountered as I went through my workday. I paid attention not only to language used but also to actions such as decisions made and activities approved or planned. Later, I would write in my journal to explore their connections to theory.

Participating in this practice sent me back to Foucault's writings on power/knowledge and discourse. I contemplated how power weds itself to certain “truths” that serve its interests, and I thought about how the “truth” that community college is job training is functioning in the community college. I realized that I had witnessed the ongoing production of the *community college student as future worker* subjectivity, which I describe in Chapter 4. From there, I re-read Bacchi and Goodwin (2016) on lived effects. This made me consider other practices – meetings, advising sessions, impromptu discussions with colleagues in the hallway, class

discussions, and so on – where community college personnel keep this knowledge circulating in service to power’s goals. I then paid attention to these practices when they occurred and recorded notes in my journal. New encounters would drive me back again to textual resources for additional explanation, which would bring me new insights. In this way, I demonstrated thinking with theory involves “borrowing theoretical concepts...from philosophers in disciplines other than our own, to enable an ‘eruption’ of new questions and previously unthought knowledge” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017, p. 720). I also went looking for the different places besides colleges where this “truth” is being circulated. I read various news and journal articles, website content, editorials, speech and interview transcripts, and other publications to discover additional practices that reflect the discourse of vocationalism.

These kinds of incidents also propelled me to Foucault’s writing on resistance and how it functions in power relations. I read Foucault (1978a) on the nature of resistance as an inflammation and realized that my feeling of anger in this meeting was Foucault’s concept in the flesh—my flesh. This feeling made me want to engage in reverse discourse and counter-conduct to revive alternative “truths.” Weedon (1997) supplied the *agent of challenge subjectivity* concept that led me to reflect on all of the ways I have seen my colleagues resisting by encouraging students to think of themselves as so much more than workers. In Chapter 6 of this dissertation, I explore these strategies.

As my invented approach demonstrates, a key word for both poststructural theory and thinking with theory is *open*—remaining open to possibility. Just as poststructural theory is about opening up possibilities that have been taken away and creating new ways of seeing and becoming, thinking with theory is about staying open to input from all sources, and when that input presents itself, doing the mental work of connecting the pieces to create new insights.

According to Jackson and Mazzei (2017), “Reading and using theory is necessary to shake us out of the complacency of seeing/hearing/thinking/feeling as we always have, or might have, or will have” (p. 720). Throughout my process, I kept St. Pierre’s advice to just “do the next thing” (Guttorm, Hohti, & Paakkari, 2015, p. 15) at the forefront of my consciousness. Repeatedly, I would finish one task and then ask myself, “OK, what should I do now?” Without fail, the answer would appear: read *this*, go look for *that*, write more about *this*, and so on. I would go do that next thing. The result was a dynamic process of generating new thought about my topic.

### **A Foucauldian Approach to Discourse Analysis**

According to Cheek (2004), “Discourse analytic research...gives great power to the analyst to impose meanings on another’s text”; therefore, researchers must ensure that their work stands up to scrutiny by foregrounding the methods and principles that guided their analysis and faithfully adhering to those methods and principles as they work (p. 1146). In the sections that follow, I discuss the meanings of *discourse* and *discourse analysis* that guide my study and explain the congruence of my approach to discourse analysis and my theoretical framework. I also present the parameters of my approach and establish my positionality as an analyst and researcher. Finally, I justify my selection of texts and discuss the issue of ethics and subjectivity.

#### *Definitions of Discourse and Discourse Analysis*

The terms *discourse* and *discourse analysis* can be defined in very different ways. In this section, I explain the definitions that guided my inquiry.

**Discourse.** Foucault himself defined the term *discourse* in different ways. For this study, I rely on two of his definitions. The first is that discourse is not just language but the “regulated practices that account for a number of statements” (Foucault, 2002, p. 90).

Two key elements in this definition are the notions of discourse as “practices” and the idea that these practices control what is said. First, discourse is not language or conversation; it is all of the practices that “regulate” because they *not only produce but also restrict what we say*. Foucault (1981) said that we are all aware that we cannot just say anything; “systems of exclusion,” are at work, controlling and limiting what is possible to express (pp. 52, 55). Prado (1995) says that discourse can be thought of as “woven-together and refined agglomerations of a myriad of repeated individual maneuvers that had their beginnings in widely varying responses to hugely diverse incidents and situations” (pp. 43-44). In other words, these practices have arisen through a mishmash of events and people’s responses to those events. Nevertheless, the practices have been established through repetition, so they are not questioned. Because discourse “organizes a way of thinking into a way of acting in the world” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 485), it creates our reality by transmitting to all members of a society information about the rules, about what is acceptable and unacceptable, about what we can and cannot say. Armed with this knowledge, we conduct ourselves accordingly.

The second important element of Foucault’s definition of discourse is the idea that discourses “account for a number of statements” (Foucault, 2002, p. 90). Elsewhere, Foucault (1972) wrote that practices “systematically form the objects of which they speak” (p. 49). Like power, therefore, discourses are productive. They generate understandings, concepts, and “regimes of truth” that advance a specific society’s beliefs about what is true and what is false (Foucault, 1980, p. 131). For example, the discourse of conventional medicine tells us that illnesses should be treated only by a medical doctor who uses only scientifically proven remedies and procedures. Dominant medical discourse sanctions certain kinds of therapies and dismisses others as false, so it limits the range of possible choices. Discourses also generate real social and

material effects on individuals, including their choice of subject positions; a person who pursues alternative therapies for an illness, for instance, will be criticized by others for endangering their own health. They do this mainly through constraint and restriction of our perceptions, which narrows the options (Mills, 2003). The discourse of conventional medicine thus marginalizes those who pursue options that have been excluded as false.

In addition to the first definition, I rely on another of Foucault's definitions of discourse as the "tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations" (Foucault, 1978a, pp. 101-102). This definition adds the idea of discourse serving as a tool of power. Discourse as a tactical element – especially the discourse of experts in positions of authority – offers what people understand to be the "truth," so power controls which "truths," which knowledges, will be available and sanctioned and which ones will be hidden, erased, or masked (Foucault, 1980). This is why, wrote Foucault (1981), "As history constantly teaches us, discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle...discourse is the power which is to be seized" (pp. 52-53). People will conduct themselves according to the rules that say what is acceptable and unacceptable; therefore, convincing them that certain rules express the "truth" brings influence over their conduct.

It is important to note, however, that discourse, like power, is impersonal (Mills, 2003). Because it consists of "agglomerations of a myriad of repeated individual maneuvers," (Prado, 1995, pp. 43-44), various practices that have no one source, there is no one puppet master determining their nature or controlling their deployment. When Foucault (1991a) described discourse as an "indifferent," "neutral," "nameless law" (pp. 71-72), he indicated that it does not

and cannot emanate from any single system, organization, or person. These practices are from everywhere at once.

**Discourse Analysis.** There are different types of the form of inquiry known as *discourse analysis*, including those that analyze the content of texts, focusing on their syntax, semantics, and so on (Fairclough, Gee, & Handford, 2012; Gillen & Petersen, 2005; Mullet, 2018). My study, however, employs Foucauldian discourse analysis, which Foucault developed in his early works, such as *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972). As Cheek (2004) points out, because it is “grounded in poststructural and postmodern understandings of the world and reality,” a Foucauldian discourse analysis takes a different approach, for it is “concerned with the way in which texts themselves have been constructed in terms of their social and historical ‘situatedness’” (p. 1144). I interpret “situatedness” as the context—the current events, values, beliefs, and mores—that is creating an environment where some things can be said and others cannot be said.

Foucault (1991a) put discourse analysis this way:

...what I am analyzing in discourse is not the system of its language, nor, in a general sense, its formal rules of construction: for I am not concerned about knowing what makes it legitimate, or makes it intelligible, or allows it to serve in communication. The question which I ask is not about codes but about events: the law of *existence* of statements, that which rendered them possible... (p. 59)

In other words, his version of discourse analysis focuses on identifying the conditions that have given rise to a particular version of reality. This is important to my study because, as I discuss in Chapter 2: Subjugation of this dissertation, there are three structural features of community colleges—neoliberalism, characteristics of community college students, and the community

college as an institution with institutional leaders—that provide the conditions in which vocationalism is either promoted or opposed. Foucauldian discourse analysis exposes the way these conditions provide fertile ground for the production of certain subject positions.

Although Foucault did not offer a method for performing this analysis, he made it clear that it involves focusing on practices – both language and actions – at the everyday or “micro” level (Foucault, 1979a, p. 26). Practices, Foucault (1991b) said, are the “‘places’ where ‘what is said and what is done, rules imposed and reasons given, the planned and the taken for granted meet and interconnect’” (p. 75). Practices in community colleges, such as advising sessions and discussions in meetings of educational leaders, reveal what power/knowledge is producing or constraining; therefore, the analyst asks questions that will uncover the “rules” that allow things to be said. As Foucault (1972) explained:

The question posed by language analysis of some discursive fact or other is always:  
according to what rules has a particular statement been made, and consequently  
according to what rules could other similar statements be made? (p. 27)

These rules, which Foucault (1972) called the “rules of formation” (p. 38), reflect the society’s dominant understandings of reality at that point in time, and the discourses they produce work to maintain those understandings as true and normal (Cheek, 2004). “True and normal” in the discourse of community college purposes are unspoken, common sense rules such as “people should go to college so that they can get good jobs and make money.” Because these rules are typically neither thought about nor verbalized, however, “they tend to elude consciousness” (Springer & Clinton, 2015, p. 89). They are influential but unspoken, so people tend to be unaware of them.

Discourse analysis is the process of detecting these rules, which arise from the system of thoughts, beliefs, and ways of behavior that underlie practices, and the effects of that system on how people think and act (Mills, 2004). The role of the Foucauldian analyst, therefore, is to work to discern what it is that goes unthought or unrecognized..., what is known about a particular problem or concern, but is not expressed, what is ignored or covered over and what is thought but left unspoken. (Springer & Clinton, 2015, p. 88)

What is known but not expressed is the taken-for-granted, “that’s just the way it is” type of thinking. Uncovering the discursive rules that guide the construction of subjectivities allows the analyst to deconstruct discourse and the way it takes charge of truth to discover the power relations at work in that process.

My own analysis is guided by adaptations of Cheek’s (2008) questions for Foucauldian discourse analysis. First, I ask, “What knowledge, realities, or “truths” are produced and constrained in this particular practice?” Sometimes, these “truths” are directly stated, and sometimes they are implied. For the analyst, they must be identified and made explicit.

Next, I ask, “What discursive rules make this particular practice possible?” In other words, what are the specific conditions of a specific time and place that constitute the existence of this discourse? I interpret the purpose of this question to be identification of the society’s current events, values, beliefs, and mores that provide the conditions for what is said. This question also concerns people’s views of who is an authority or “expert” (and, therefore, a source of “truth”) and what kinds of evidence are acceptable (Rabinow & Rose, 1994). The analyst must discover these conditions to deconstruct discourse and discover what enables certain things to be “sayable” (Foucault, 1991a, p. 59).



My third question is, “What rules say that some expressions are true while others are false?” Foucault said that discourse’s technique for establishing truth is “the fixing of norms for the elaboration of concepts and theories” (as cited in Bouchard, 1977, p. 199). Norms, or what is “in the true” (Foucault, 1981, p. 60) allow for *normalizing judgment*, the negative assessment of individuals or groups for the purpose of determining how far they deviate from the established norm (Foucault, 1979a). *Dividing practices* result in the subject being “either divided inside himself or divided from others...Examples are the mad and the sane, the sick and the healthy, and the criminals and the ‘good boys’” (Foucault, 1982, p. 208); in community colleges, it might be the students enrolled in practical programs (the ones, such as construction and nursing, with a direct connection to a specific job) and students enrolled in impractical programs (the ones, such as visual or performing arts, with uncertain job prospects). Social beings adopt social norms to govern their behavior so that they will not be labeled “different” and excluded; that is why, said Foucault (1978a), normalization is an important tool of power. Its dividing practices create binary oppositions that make most people want to stay on the “acceptable” side. Therefore, my role as a discourse analyst is to describe the dividing practices that enable particular subject positions for people (Foucault, 1982).

Finally, I ask, “How is this practice being used to keep power relations circulating or to disrupt them?” The answer to this question arises out of the answers to the previous three questions. This form of “ascending analysis,” which begins at the level of practices, thus moves upward and outward to reveal the power relations at work (Foucault, 1980, p. 99).

An analysis driven by these questions ultimately leads to a description of the conditions that address the first two overarching questions of my inquiry: 1) How do power relations and practices produce knowledge about the purposes of community college education? and 2) How

do these relations produce and constrain subjectivities for community college students and community college faculty and other leaders?

The work of Foucault-influenced poststructural inquiry is to make visible the power relations and the unexamined assumptions that underlie practices. For Foucault, discourse is a window into both. Texts and practices arise from society's constructions and understandings of reality, and they also reinforce those understandings. Therefore, discourse analysis provides the best tool for interrogating these texts and practices.

Foucault's thought changed over the course of his work, so my discourse analysis draws predominantly on the concepts of power, knowledge, and subjectivity as he expressed them in his mid-career works from approximately 1978 to 1982. These works include *The History of Sexuality* (1978a), *Power/Knowledge* (1980), and "The Subject and Power" (1982).

#### *My Positionality as Analyst/Researcher: Ethics and Subjectivity*

According to Cheek (2008) "when undertaking discourse analysis, researchers are in a position to impose meanings on another's text. The position of the researcher must therefore be made explicit throughout the research process" (pp. 356-357). As community college leader, I am attuned to and a participant in practices – at the national, state, and local levels – that are related to and impact me in my work. I tend to judge every practice by whether or not it advances *students'* interests and holistic development as human beings; I believe that educators should never categorize students and urge them to pursue certain life paths depending on these categories; instead, we should encourage everyone to consider all options. I disagree with viewing students only as "future workers." Consequently, I oppose practices such as "tracking" students into certain education or training programs depending on their high school performance, which I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 5: *The Workforce Developer*

Subjectivity. Admittedly, as I fulfill my responsibilities to my college's various constituencies, I sometimes play a role in perpetuating the very practices I critique.

I am also subject to the discourse that contributes to reinforcement and maintenance of established practices. However, I sometimes seek to change the discourse that is governing those practices by offering competing perspectives. For example, in a recent discussion with a colleague, I objected to using graduation rates as a measure of how well community colleges provide a return on taxpayers' investment. I oppose this "completion" movement, which has growing support in our neoliberal environment, because policies focusing on completion have the potential to begin limiting educational access and/or support services for those students who, upon entry, do not display the characteristics that have been identified as predictive of success. These students would include many community college students, so the end result could be excluding those citizens from educational opportunities (Mullin, 2012). In addition, the term *completion* suggests that, until degree attainment occurs, education is incomplete and, therefore, lacking in value. Furthermore, the term suggests that degree attainment marks the completion of one's education; thus, it argues against the promotion of lifelong learning.

As a researcher, I must acknowledge my Foucault-influenced poststructural worldview. For me, Foucault's is the most logical explanation of human relations that I have ever encountered. I agree with him that we are born into a socially constructed world, that there is not one "truth" but many, control of the "truth" is power, and that power must narrow people's range of options to achieve its ends. Any situation involving two or more people can be better understood as a demonstration of power/knowledge relations; conversely, these situations illuminate how power/knowledge relations work. Thus, I examine the practices I have chosen to critique through a Foucauldian lens.

In positivist and empirical social science research, researchers must concern themselves with issues of validity, reliability, and generalizability of their studies. According to St. Pierre (2019), the ontology and epistemology of poststructural, post qualitative research is incompatible with these issues. However, a concern for ethical research compels me to clarify that poststructural inquiry seeks simply to provide a “*pure description of discursive events*” (Foucault, 1972, p. 27) rather than search for answers or truth. For poststructuralists, any description of anything is going to be constructed and, therefore, fictional rather than factual (Mills, 2003), fictional in the sense of created, rather than false or in need of proof. Still, though, this description provides the starting point for searching for the rules that wed so-called “truth” to power ; showing that these rules are not as normal, natural, or universal as they appear; freeing our thought from them; and thus allowing for alternative possibilities (Foucault, 1980). This, Foucault believed, is the intellectual’s task (Foucault, 1980).

From my subjectivities as a researcher following Foucault and an educational leader who is influenced by the discourse of community college purposes, I did not set out to produce the only possible interpretation of the practices I analyze, nor do I claim to have done so. Instead, I deconstruct the reality produced by the texts and practices I chose, acknowledging that these deconstructions are unique to the situatedness—the current events, values, beliefs, and mores of the society in which these practices occur—of my study.

## **Conclusion**

The combination of poststructural theory, a post qualitative thinking with theory method, and Foucauldian discourse analysis provided me with a helpful framework for deconstructing the power/knowledge relations involved over the struggle over the purposes of community college education. This theory and method also provided me with a useful set of tools for analyzing how

what we take for granted and assume to be true has actually arisen out of this power network and, therefore, must be questioned.

In the chapters that follow, I use these tools to deconstruct several practices that show what power produces. My analysis reveals that these practices both arise from and circulate the discourse of vocationalism, which, in service to the goal of reducing community college education to job training, produces the *future worker* subjectivity for students and the *workforce developer* subjectivity for faculty and other community college leaders. However, the power relations of community college purposes also produce the *agent of challenge* subjectivity that resists how power exploits and oppresses people by limiting their options.

## Chapter 4: The *Future Worker* Subjectivity

*[People] obey rules which are not given to their consciousness.*

(Foucault, 1991a, p. 71)

In Chapter 2, I described structural features of community colleges that provide the conditions for the emergence of power/knowledge relations that aim to limit community college education to job training. To achieve this goal, power employs the discourse of vocationalism to limit acceptable subjectivities to just one, the *future worker* subjectivity, thereby subjugating community college students to the notion that trying to become anything else is abnormal or deviant.

Deconstructing the discourse of vocationalism reveals how specific subjectivities—such as future worker—are constructed or silenced in service to power’s goals. This deconstruction requires the use of discourse analysis.

In this chapter, I use the approach to discourse analysis that I explained in Chapter 3: The Subjectivities of Inquiry, along with a thinking with theory methodology, to analyze specific practices at the national, state, and institutional levels that produce the *community college student as future worker* subjectivity. I also explore the lived effects of this subject position. This analysis demonstrates how, as Foucault states in this chapter’s opening quote, we obey rules outside of our awareness. My analysis also produces new insights and additional questions in response to the first two of my four research questions:

- 1) How do power relations and practices produce knowledges about the purposes of community college education?

- 2) How do these relations produce and constrain subjectivities for community college students and community college faculty and other leaders?
- 3) What are the resistances within these relations of power?
- 4) How might these points of resistance create possibilities for new discourse and practices?

I address the third and fourth questions in Chapters 6 and 7 of this dissertation.

### **My Selection of Practices for Analysis**

My analysis is based upon three practices: (a) a speech by an elected official, (b) a mission statement, and (c) an example of marketing material. All are published texts that I collected through Internet searches. (In Chapter 5: The *Workforce Developer* Subjectivity, I extend my discourse analysis by presenting excerpts of conversations in which I myself was a participant. I collected those excerpts by keeping a journal and recording notes about the verbal exchanges in these conversations.)

I selected these three practices, first of all, because they all convey “expert” discourse. Foucault (1978a) made it clear that it is *expert* discourse – the discourse of authority figures in society’s respected professions and institutions – that establishes “regimes of truth” and produces subjectivities. These individuals, said Foucault (1972) “have the right, sanctioned by law or tradition, juridically defined or spontaneously accepted, to proffer...a discourse” due to their status, their prestige, or their “special quality,” and to be deemed by public opinion to be reliable sources of truth (p. 50). The authority figures in the practices I analyze in this chapter include one elected official, administrators at a community college system, and administrators at one community college. Their positions convey their supposed expertise and, thus, their right to say things that are viewed as legitimate.

In addition, all of these practices have been influenced by neoliberal discourse that promotes the vocationalist purpose of community college education. Although the practices come from different sectors (government and education) at national, state, and local levels, they all contribute to shaping the “truth” about what community colleges do. Analysis of these practices leads to new insights in response to the first two of my four research questions:

- 1) How do power relations and practices produce knowledges about the purposes of community college education?
- 2) How do these relations produce and constrain subjectivities for community college students and community college faculty and other leaders?

In my analysis of resistance in the power/knowledge relations of community college purposes (Chapter 6: The *Agent of Challenge* Subjectivity), I discuss a variety of different practices, such as certain student recruiting and curricular practices, that open up additional possibilities. An examination of these practices produces ideas in response to the last two of my four research questions:

- 3) What are the resistances within these relations of power?
- 4) How might these points of resistance create possibilities for new discourse and practices?

### **An Analysis of Practices**

Practices at all levels of society reveal and reinforce the vocationalism of the community college. The discourse analysis that follows examines one national-level practice, one state-level practice, and one institutional-level practice in which power/knowledge produces the *community college student as future worker* subjectivity. The first practice is a speech delivered by President Barack Obama at Macomb Community College in 2009. The second practice is the



mission statement of the North Carolina Community College System. The third practice is a marketing message for prospective community college students.

*President Barack Obama's Speech at Macomb Community College*

Community colleges have long been viewed as institutions that provide job training, but the Great Recession, a period of worldwide economic decline that began in December 2007 and lasted until June 2009 (Rich, 2013), further strengthened and spread this perception in part due to speeches like the one that U.S. President Barack Obama delivered on July 14, 2009, at Macomb Community College in Warren, Michigan. At the time, many American citizens were suffering from the effects of the downturn. Manufacturers and businesses were closing, and thousands of people were losing their jobs. This period was characterized by rising unemployment rates that peaked at 10% in October 2009, a 30% decline in home prices, and a sharp decrease in the net worth of American households and non-profit organizations (Rich, 2013).

Under these circumstances, President Obama traveled to Michigan to announce a proposal he called the American Graduation Initiative. In his speech, he began by acknowledging that Michigan, in particular, had been hit hard by the recession, with unemployment rates of up to 15% due to a high rate of job loss in that state's auto industry. He said that some want to blame the businesses for their poor management that caused the failures and required massive employee lay-offs, and he agreed that they should be held accountable for their poor decisions. He went on to say, though, that even after these failures are corrected, the economy has changed, and many of the jobs lost will not return.

The solution, President Obama asserted, was for laid-off workers to enroll in community colleges to be re-trained for the jobs that will be created as the country begins "generating new businesses and new industries to replace the ones that we've lost" (Obama, 2009). It is

imperative, he said, that “we’re educating and preparing our people for the new jobs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We’ve got to prepare our people with the skills they need to compete in this global economy” (Obama, 2009).

Finally, President Obama announced his proposal to spend \$12 billion of federal funds over 10 years on his American Graduation Initiative. The components of this initiative included competitive grant funding for “programs that match curricula in the classroom with the needs of the boardroom,” a fund for “programs that track student progress inside and outside the classroom” as a way to improve college completion rates, more affordable loans that community colleges can obtain to modernize their facilities, and grant funding for the creation of free online education (Obama 2009). These actions will not only help us solve this crisis but also “lay a foundation on which our children and grandchildren can prosper” (Obama, 2009).

My analytic approach includes the identification of three key knowledges (“truths” or realities) asserted in this speech and the discovery of the discursive rules that are permitting these knowledges to be stated and labeled “truth.” This process involves pointing out the norms that are being created and the dividing practices being used to uphold those norms. Describing these tactics disturbs the discourse that sustains power relations and shows how power is sustaining these knowledges. It is important to remember, however, that this power is impersonal. The discourse of neoliberalism influences everyone, not just President Obama. He merely circulates certain “truths” and ignores others in keeping with society’s current values. For Foucault (1994a), it is impossible to do otherwise when “the ways of thinking [on which] the accepted practices are based” remain unexamined (p. 172).

**A “Truth” about Americans.** The first key knowledge or “truth” offered in President Obama’s speech is a characterization of American citizens as people who always meet

challenges head on and do what needs to be done to fix problems. “That’s what America does,” he says. “We hit some challenges, we fuss and argue about it, and then we go ahead and go about the business of solving our problems” (Obama, 2009). He reminds the audience that at every juncture in our history when we’ve been challenged, we have summoned the resilience and the industriousness – that can-do American spirit – that has allowed us to succeed in the face of even the toughest odds. (Obama, 2009)

President Obama evokes the image of the proud American who does not succumb to self-pity when things go wrong; instead, he or she gets to work setting things right. The president also asserts the notion that this “problem” is the audience members’ to “fix.”

Deconstructing *how* President Obama can say this requires an examination of the discursive rules that make his assertion possible. Discourse is not what is said; it is the collection of “rules” (in the form of current events, values, beliefs, and mores) that provide the conditions for what is said. One rule permitting this statement is the expectation that, in the United States, citizens who are experiencing extreme hardship have always looked to their leaders, political and otherwise, for assistance. We trust the head of our nation to have our best interests at heart, to understand the situation, and to determine and implement the best solution. The presence of the president of the United States demonstrates this rule, and the fact that he was flanked at this event by other authority figures from local, state, and national government; higher education; business and industry; and workers’ unions (Briere, 2009) lends tacit approval to the key knowledges the President offers in his speech. As a leader and expert, he is viewed as a source of “truth.” Furthermore, his portrait of Americans and their characteristics is congruent with his audience members’ own self-image, which has been instilled throughout their lives via family

values, the U.S. educational system, and media portrayals. Together, these conditions establish the favorable climate for the “truths” the president shares.

Next, we consider the rules that make the expressions in this neoliberal discourse true while others will be considered false. These rules involve the fixing of norms and the application of normalizing judgment to create dividing practices. This practice fixes as a norm American workers’ “can-do spirit” and their responsibility to own and solve the problem. This puts the onus squarely on the individual and perpetuates a “boot-strap” mentality. What goes unsaid, however, is the fact that structural factors in government, the banking and finance industry, the legal system, corporations, and so on created the economic crisis (Palley, 2009). Economists have identified the recession’s causes as 40 years of neoliberal policies and legislation that eliminated protections designed to prevent this very kind of economic meltdown (Palley, 2009). Therefore, American *workers* who have no control over larger structures are not at all the people who can “fix” the fundamental issues. Bacchi and Goodwin (2016) point out that government policy—in keeping with neoliberal principles—has a tendency to blame problems on the failings or deficiencies of individuals; these authors illustrate how policies on poverty, addiction, and illiteracy, for example, blame individuals for not doing something or for lacking certain abilities rather than identifying structural causes. However, this viewpoint is not in keeping with a respected leader’s expert characterization of American workers and their role. It is also not widely understood. Anyone who might question President Obama’s silence about structural factors could be negatively assessed with labels such as “un-American” and possibly seen as deviating from the normative ideology of bootstrap culture.

Finally, we consider the question, “How is this practice being used to keep power relations circulating or to disrupt them?” Power, said Foucault (1978a), is always exercised with

a goal in mind. In fact, power, is really nothing more than “modes of action upon possible action, the action of others” (Foucault, 1982, p. 225). In other words, power relations seek to influence people’s choices and behaviors, and these attempts are revealed in an analysis of practices. In Obama’s speech, power seeks to perpetuate and appeal to a self-image of pride and resourcefulness that will inspire the audience to take ownership of the problem and commit to solving it. Achieving this goal serves power relations by diverting attention away from actual causes and, thus, avoiding responsibility and blame. As Foucault (1978a) pointed out, “Silence and secrecy are a shelter for power” (p. 101), hence the use of a tactic that moves attention elsewhere.

**A “Truth” about American Workers.** A second key knowledge or “truth” offered in this practice is the belief that many American workers do not possess the right skills for the “jobs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (Obama, 2009). President Obama implies that workers’ skills are outdated, suitable only for jobs that are fast disappearing. Only when American workers acquire new skills, he says, will they be able to “compete in this global economy” (Obama, 2009).

Several discursive rules make this particular practice possible. The first rule is a tolerance for partial or oversimplified explanations of disasters such as the Great Recession. President Obama acknowledges or hints at only two sources of job loss: company mismanagement and technological disruption. The discourse of neoliberalism erases other causes, such as corporations’ cost-saving outsourcing of jobs to other countries where workers are paid far less than American workers. These jobs did not become obsolete; they are now done outside of the United States. In addition, what is silenced in the speech are how the practices of neoliberal capitalism—such as deregulating business and finance, lowering the taxes of business and wealthy citizens, attacking trade unions, and replacing permanent employees with temporary

and part-time workers—seriously destabilized the economy (Kotz, 2009). Encouraging the audience’s belief in a partial explanation contributes to subjectification by laying the foundation for what they are about to be asked to believe about themselves and, thus, is expedient for achieving power relations’ ends.

Another discursive rule that makes this practice possible is composed of a collection of beliefs about the relationship between employers and workers. These beliefs include all of the following: (a) Workers’ individual prosperity and success is directly related to business and industry’s prosperity and success. Therefore, it is paramount that everyone fulfills capitalists’ needs so that those employers will not take their jobs elsewhere. (b) It is natural and acceptable for capitalist enterprises to care more about profit than people, and capitalists cannot be faulted for doing anything that needs to be done to ensure that they make as much money as possible. Their needs are more important than anyone else’s, and their economic contributions are so critical that they are free to ruin American citizens financially if doing so contributes to their own personal gain. (c) Business and industry owners need not feel any moral or humanitarian obligation to the workers whose labor is a key component of the business or industry’s success, nor should these owners feel any responsibility for re-training and re-skilling their workers when the need arises. That is the workers’ personal responsibility and the function of U.S. educational systems. All of these beliefs, stemming from the key tenets of the neoliberal economic theory that has permeated the very bedrock of all U.S. institutions, are simply accepted as norms and go unquestioned. As “just the way things are,” these beliefs establish the necessary conditions for President Obama’s assertion that workers are to blame if they do not possess the correct skills.

One final discursive rule is the neoliberal notion that citizens' success or failure is due solely to their own actions rather than to any structural features in their society. We are subjected to the belief that we make or break ourselves. If we find ourselves unable to compete, we must acquire the "right" knowledge and skills at our own expense. This notion creates what Bacchi and Goodwin (2016) call "responsibilized subjects"—individuals are held responsible for their lives while the "broad-based social factors that shape lives" are ignored or downplayed (p. 73). We are made to think that we are subjects of our own making, our own actions, when we are actually being constructed and controlled by judgments about our deficiencies.

The most consequential norms established under these conditions are the notions that "jobs of the 21st century" require certain kinds of skills, and that, because capitalist enterprises have no obligation to their workers, Americans are responsible for remedying their individual deficiencies, at their own expense, when their current skills are no longer useful. These norms create the binary opposition of *21st century job skills* and *outdated job skills*. They also create a second binary opposition: *individuals who are re-educating themselves* and *individuals who are not doing their part to fill workforce needs*. The latter group, of course, is subject to the negative assessment of dividing practices because normalizing judgment says they are failing to do what they should be doing.

These practices keep power relations circulating by maintaining the "truth" that we are all beholden to capitalist enterprises, which should be allowed to make whatever moves are necessary to ensure high profits. As "modes of action upon possible action" (Foucault, 1982, p. 225), power urges compliance with business and industry needs, even when these companies feel no sense of responsibility to their workers. It also discourages asking questions that could

expose how structural features – such as laws, policies, tax codes, institutional and corporate decision-making – created or contributed to the problem in the first place.

**A “Truth” about Community Colleges.** The third knowledge or “truth” that President Obama asserts in his speech is that the Americans who have skill deficiencies or lack an associate degree need to enroll in a community college for job training. He says, We know that in the coming years, jobs requiring at least an associate degree are projected to grow twice as fast as jobs requiring no college experience. We will not fill those jobs – or even keep those jobs here in America – without the training offered by community colleges. (Obama, 2009)

A number of discursive rules establish the conditions for this speech’s emergence. The first rule rests on evidence that a growing number of jobs require pre-employment training along with evidence of lagging higher education attainment among American adults, most of whom have not earned even an associate degree. The audience will accept that information, which is being offered by the president of the United States, as true, reliable, and convincing. Yet another rule is the existing, widespread perception of community colleges as institutions that deliver job training for the workforce. Because people are at least somewhat familiar with community colleges, they will easily accept this assertion. Finally, the rule that expects workers to take personal responsibility for re-educating themselves, which applied to the second key knowledge, also applies here. This rule is evident in the threat of job loss should workers choose not to comply.

This “truth” fixes a number of norms. The first is the notion that the purpose of the community college is workforce development. Although President Obama does initially describe the community college as a place where people can “pursue their dream” and “take a



chance on a brighter future for themselves and their families,” the entire remainder of his speech is about community colleges’ role in providing training for jobs that require new skills (Obama, 2009). With a few exceptions, these jobs tend to be low- to medium-skilled positions because they require only two years of pre-employment preparation. President Obama mentions no other purpose of higher education, so we can infer that people’s “dreams” are restricted to *job-related* dreams. The discourse that silences the other broader, historical purposes of community colleges—as erased in President Obama’s speech—limits the audience’s perceptions about these institutions and narrows community college education to job training.

A second norm offered in this practice is the idea that people protect themselves from future unemployment if they commit to continuing their education now. Re-training for different kinds of jobs will give people “an edge,” “improve their skills and broaden their horizons,” and help them “withstand future economic storms” (Obama, 2009). What the discourse of community college purposes avoids saying, however, is that whatever training people pursue merely puts them back to work in the same flawed system that caused the latest economic catastrophe. The behaviors of individual workers will not eliminate their vulnerability to structural factors that are not being discussed or addressed. Because the same thing could happen again, additional training provides only the illusion of job security, fulfillment of dreams, and upward mobility.

These norms lead to normalizing judgment and dividing practices. If education at a community college is solely about job training, then a person who enrolls for that reason is practical and sensible, and a person who pursues higher education for any other reason (e.g., to expand one’s knowledge about a particular subject, to develop an artistic skill, or to pursue a

broad-based plan of personal development or lifelong learning) is being impractical or foolish. Also foolish is anyone who fails to follow the president's good advice.

Power/knowledge relations need for American workers to acquire skill sets necessary for new capitalist enterprises and to restore their status as tax-paying citizens who will look favorably upon current elected officials' efforts to help them. As "modes of action upon possible action" (Foucault, 1982, p. 225), power invokes a set of knowledges or "truths" in an attempt to influence the audience's potential actions by appealing to their American pride and resourcefulness, by maintaining their incomplete understanding of the crisis' causes, by encouraging their willingness to follow their leader's prescribed course of action, by convincing them that employers' needs are paramount, and by inspiring them with hopeful language that suggests future prosperity. The end goal is to convince citizens to enroll in community colleges to re-educate themselves for whatever employers' needs turn out to be.

If they do so, they will begin their education with the belief that their sole purpose is to train for a new job, thereby choosing to inhabit the *community college student as future worker* subjectivity, which was constructed for them by power/knowledge relations that have a vested interest in promoting only the vocationalist purpose of community colleges. These students will be less likely to set any broader goals for their college experience. If they do, normalization and dividing practices will quickly remind them to re-focus on turning themselves into workers. Thus, they will limit what they themselves could become.

President Obama's speech, according to the transcript, was punctuated by applause throughout, indicating that many if not most of the audience members accepted the knowledges presented in this practice as true. In doing so, they also reinforced and strengthened the power that promotes these understandings of the world.

*Mission Statement of the North Carolina Community College System*

The next practice I analyze is a state-level practice. In keeping with national-level practices such as President Obama’s speech, the mission statement of the North Carolina Community College System is

to open the door to high-quality, accessible educational opportunities that minimize barriers to post-secondary education, maximize student success, *develop a globally and multi-culturally competent workforce*, and improve the lives and well-being of individuals by providing:

- Education, training and retraining *for the workforce* including basic skills and literacy education, *occupational* and pre-baccalaureate programs.
- Support for *economic development* through services to and in *partnership with business and industry* and in collaboration with the [university system] and private colleges and universities.
- Services to communities and individuals which improve the quality of life.

(emphasis added, North Carolina Community College System, *Mission and history*)

I added emphasis to key phrases that indicate a vocationalist purpose for the entire system of colleges. The word *college* has historically been defined as an institution of higher learning that provides a general or liberal arts education rather than technical or professional training, distinguishing it from *technical institutes* and *vocational and technical schools*. Nevertheless, this mission makes it clear that the sole purpose of all education in these colleges is workforce development and economic development. Even pre-baccalaureate programs (mentioned in the first bullet point) are a type of education “for the workforce” only, and the partnership with

senior higher education institutions is described (in the second bullet point) as a type of “economic development” only. In addition, this statement presents improvement to “the lives and well-being of individuals” as solely an economic issue. In fact, this mission statement is noticeably silent about any of the broader, historical purposes of higher education. Although there is one vague, final bullet point about providing “services” that “improve the quality of life,” the lack of detail (what are these services?) combined with the fact that these services are separated and, therefore, distinct from the system’s major purpose – “education” – in the first bullet point indicates almost exclusive interest in workforce development and no other purpose.

This discourse of vocationalism privileges workforce development, and the other purposes then become “subjugated knowledges,” which, according to Foucault (2003), are “historical knowledges” that “have been buried or masked” or “disqualified” because they are supposedly not well explained or “naive” or “inferior” (p. 7). Discourse must marginalize any alternative “truths” that are unnecessary or antithetical to power’s aims.

This process is clear in North Carolina, where leaders from all sectors place heavy emphasis on economic development. The state’s political leaders maintain tax structures and provide incentives to attract and keep business and industry (North Carolina Department of Commerce, 2020). State leaders also view the public K-12 education system, the community college system, and the university system as key components of that development. For example, the myFutureNC Commission, a group of North Carolina leaders in education, business, philanthropic organizations, and government, was created to determine how the state’s education systems at all levels could be strengthened in order to build the state’s economy (Steering Committee of the myFutureNC Commission, 2019). Although its 166-page report does include two or three sentences that mention the personal and civic benefits of education, the rest of the

report focuses on how education improves the state's economic competitiveness (Steering Committee of the myFutureNC Commission, 2019). The community college system is viewed as especially vital to workforce development because of the nature of its job training programs that link directly to industry needs. Its mission statement reflects this emphasis on vocationalism. Its current strategic plan is entitled *Putting Education to Work*. Its new 2019 state-wide marketing campaign, which forthrightly aims to improve the state's workforce, brands community colleges as "Your **Hire** Education" (Stancill, 2019). These practices arise from widespread acceptance of neoliberal principles by government, business and industry, education, *and* the general public. When all of these entities view education solely as a driver of economic development, it is perfectly natural for the community college system to propagate the same message through adherence to the discourse of vocationalism. As I pointed out in Chapter 2: Subjugation of this dissertation, when the principles of neoliberal ideology are embodied and enacted by leaders, the *worker* subjectivity is created for employees and for students, who are employees-to-be.

Another discursive rule invokes the status of the state's community college system as an expert government entity. North Carolina's Department of Community Colleges is governed by the State Board of Community Colleges, which reports to the state's governor. Thus, it qualifies as an expert—a reliable source of information due to law or tradition (Foucault, 1972)—that is properly invested with the authority to determine the best purposes for the state's community colleges. Decisions of this level of authority are assumed to be based upon expertise and in the best interest of the state's citizens.

What rules say that these messages are true while others are false? The norm holds that the most important function of a state's higher education institutions is economic development

and that community colleges, in particular, produce workers and assist in the development of businesses and industries. Therefore, normalizing judgment creates the preferred category of *students pursuing workforce training* and also the opposing category of the binary: *students who are wasting their time on academic pursuits that may not link directly to jobs*. The students in the latter category are subjected to negative assessment. When the discursive norm maintains that workforce training is the most important type of education and that education improves individuals' lives and well-being only when it contributes to their workplace success, then any other types of education are either non-existent or unimportant, so those who pursue those other types are judged to be idealistic, impractical, or illogical.

Even more disturbing, these dividing practices undermine community colleges' role in achieving socioeconomic equity. Because dividing practices are "dynamic practices of differentiation and subordination... they often target minorities or groups in terms of "race" or ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality" (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 51). Stich and Reeves (2016) showed that the mission statements of elite (high-ranking) higher education institutions that serve a disproportionate number of white students from high socioeconomic classes profess goals such as knowledge acquisition, intellectual development, leadership, and service for those students. The implication is that these students are the ones who are being cultivated to become society's leaders. In comparison, mission statements like that of the North Carolina Community College system make it clear that the racially and ethnically diverse students of lower socioeconomic classes who make up the majority of community college students should train to enter the "workforce." Even the pre-baccalaureate programs in North Carolina community colleges are described (along with all other programs) as a type of workforce development.

How does this practice keep power relations circulating? Interrogating this issue requires a determination of who stands to benefit when community colleges emphasize workforce development and ignore or downplay their other broader, historical purposes. In an environment where economic development is the sole or top priority, business and industry owners become the ruling economic class whose needs are paramount. They require trained workers, so public schools and community colleges become “economic engines,” and community college personnel become “workforce developers” who are training the workers. Elected officials benefit by establishing the conditions for a pipeline of workers flowing from the schools to businesses and industries.

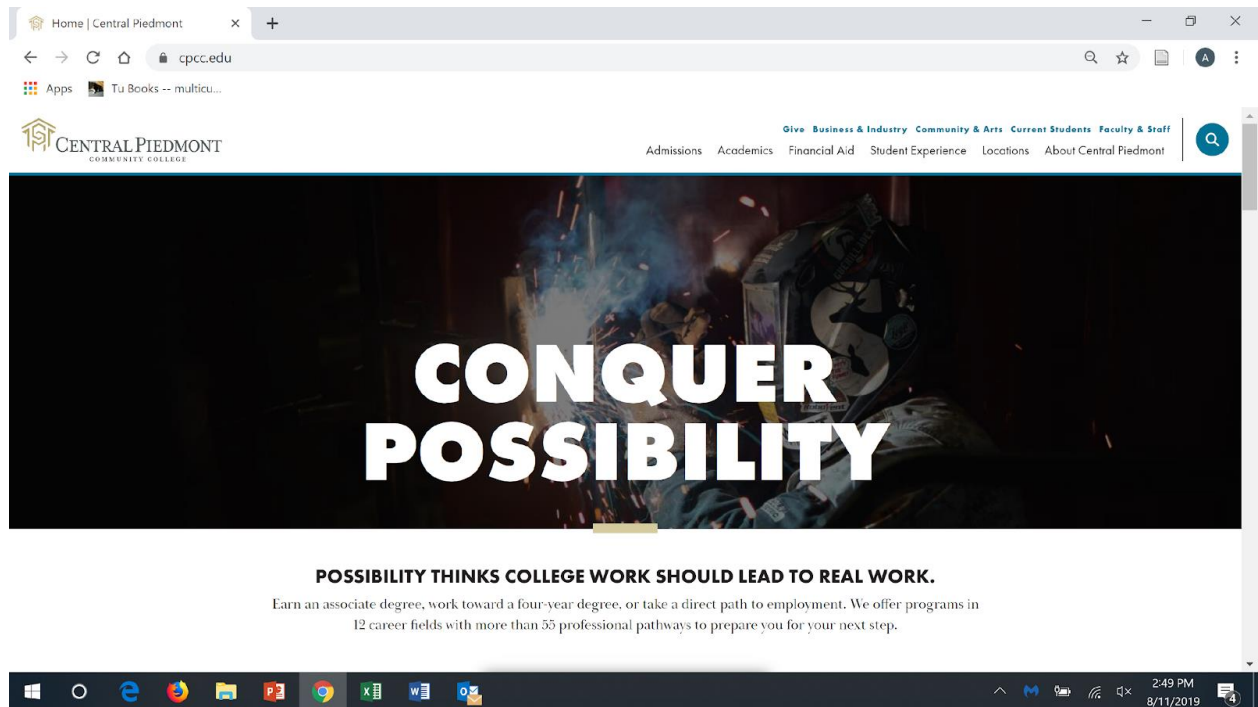
Students, too, are viewed as winners because they obtain low- to medium-skilled jobs after just two years of education. However, these power relations have reduced them to *future workers* only. Their academic programs will contain mainly courses focused on specific job-related skills. A few of the five or so general education courses in their associate degree program will be presented as beneficial for developing “soft skills” that are useful on the job (e.g., communications courses). The others will be described as valuable for holistic development (e.g., humanities and social sciences courses), but only by the instructors of those courses. This message will typically not be reinforced anywhere else. In the end, people who are seen as future workers get little encouragement to see themselves as more.

Even if students themselves never encounter a state-level mission statement, its message is operating in the background at all of the state’s community colleges, communicating to all faculty and staff that the most important thing we do is create workers, and everything about our students’ education should focus on contributing to their workplace success. At the institutional level, we wed these knowledges to power by taking actions that are in keeping with these

knowledges. As a result, the practices of marketing, recruiting, academic program development, and advising reinforce the knowledge that education is workforce development. When everything that community college faculty and staff say and do reflects this belief, we communicate it to students, and once again, power/knowledge creates the subjectivity *community college student as future worker*.

### *One Community College's Marketing Message*

In the discussion of the state-level mission statement in the previous section, I stated that the language of this mission statement affects institutional-level marketing campaigns and recruiting practices. Figure 3 below is a screenshot of one North Carolina community college's homepage. When students access this college's website, this is the first thing they see.



*Figure 3. Marketing message that promotes only work-related goals.*



Although the phrase “Conquer Possibility” initially suggests that it applies to *any* personal goal, the image of a welder followed by text that focuses solely on work instantly narrows the college’s purpose to workforce-related goals alone. That text is as follows:

POSSIBILITY THINKS COLLEGE *WORK* SHOULD LEAD TO REAL *WORK*.

Earn an associate degree, *work* toward a four-year degree, or take a direct path to *employment*. We offer programs in 12 *career fields* with more than 55 *professional* pathways to prepare you for your next step.

I added emphasis to key words and phrases that indicate the explicit vocationalist purpose of this college. The sentence “college work should lead to real work” focuses higher education exclusively on job training. In the second sentence, we can infer that an associate degree and a four-year degree, too, are “paths to employment”; they are just indirect instead of direct paths. The third sentence indicates that all this college offers is preparation for careers and professions.

What are the discursive rules that make this message “sayable”? Again, this practice naturally reflects the heavy, neoliberal emphasis on economic development in state government and the state’s educational systems. When economic development is the most important goal, then everything—including education—must be about economic development.

A second discursive rule is the college’s status as an institution of higher education, which invests its leaders with the authority to decide what type of education is most important for the citizens of their community. Another rule is many citizens’ desire for a well-paid position, which makes the community college’s message appealing, as well as their acceptance of community college programs as a legitimate form of preparation for those positions. A final rule is the American preference for utilitarian, job-related education. According to a 2011 report,

47% of the general public say that college should be about career preparation, 39% say that it should be about personal and intellectual growth, and the remaining 14% said that college should be about both career preparation and personal growth (Pew Research Center, 2011).

The norms fixed by this discourse include all of the following: (a) job training is the only purpose of community college education; (b) a community college students' two goals are a degree and a job; and (c) college is a type of work, nothing else, but it is not "real" work. All of these norms exclude the broader purposes of higher education by suggesting that the only reason to engage in the "work" of college is to obtain "real work." Any educational pursuit undertaken without a career pathway in mind, therefore, must be a waste of time, money, and energy. This leads to the dividing practice of labeling those who seek a broader education as deviant from the norm because they have made the poor choice of a less-defined path to a job. It also divides community college coursework into two categories: *beneficial courses that focus on job-related skills* and *general education courses that seem to lack value*—and are, therefore, a waste of time and money—if they cannot be reframed as courses that develop soft skills sought after by employers. This binary opposition is addressed more fully in Chapter 5: *The Workforce Developer Subjectivity*.

This practice keeps power relations circulating by reinforcing the notion that the community college turns students into workers. There is apparently no other purpose for enrolling. People who do enroll, therefore, are accepting the subjectivity *community college student as future worker* for themselves.

### *Lived Effects*

St. Pierre (2011) pointed out that "power relations constitute human beings within discursive formations that are only *descriptions*" (p. 623). However, these descriptions are

powerful. “In the end,” said Foucault (1980), “we are judged, condemned, classified, determined in our undertakings, destined to a certain mode of living or dying, as a function of the true discourses which are the bearers of the specific effects of power” (p. 94). Practices and the subjectivities they generate are responsible for what Foucault called “effects in the real to which [discourses] are linked” (as cited in Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 37). Poststructural analysts refer to these as “lived effects,” or significant and potentially damaging impacts on the ways people live their lives (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, pp. 23, 108).

One effect of creating the subjectivity *community college student as future worker* is a refusal to inhabit this subjectivity. Confronted with the ubiquitous message that community college education equals job training, some prospective students reject – for a variety of different reasons – the idea of enrolling in an institution clearly dedicated to turning them into workers.

Others may enroll but also defiantly reject and resist this subjectivity in favor of pursuing a broader education in spite of ongoing attempts to coax them back to the norm. They may go so far as to inhabit the *agent of challenge* subjectivity that I discuss in Chapter 6. However, these individuals will be subjected to repeated attacks on their choices, which could lead to feelings of anger, despair, or both.

When students do choose to accept and inhabit the *community college student as future worker* subjectivity, one effect can be dropping out of college. Individuals who select programs based solely on the promise of a stable job may find themselves training for work that does not interest them, inspire them, or suit their talents and skills. As a result, they quit school.

According to the North Carolina Community College System, over 700,000 students enroll in North Carolina community colleges every year (*Get the Facts*). For those who entered in 2004, the completion rate for a “two-year” associate’s degree was only 41% after *six* years (Stancill,

2015). Of course, myriad causes explain this low rate of success, but one of them is lack of sufficient interest in the academic program and career goal. College completion requires a long, sustained period of sacrifice and hard work; students whose dedication to a particular academic path is weak are less likely to stay on that path.

Those who do enroll and select direct, linear, two-year paths to jobs may deny themselves opportunities to develop, through coursework or extracurricular activities, their specific talents or aptitudes, not only as workers but also as individuals, community members, and citizens. When this happens, individuals fail to discover and pursue vocations or avocations in which they may have excelled. Consequently, society loses out on what those individuals could have offered had they not believed a narrow conception of their own potential or purposes for attending college.

People who are deterred, by themselves or by others, from pursuing their true passions and aptitudes might experience a decline in their overall quality of life. They might spend their days saddled with regrets about choosing the safe option rather than an option that would have given their lives greater satisfaction and meaning.

Students who are treated as future workers get the sense that community college personnel see them as “one-dimensional; as if specific, job-related competencies are the only skills they are worthy to hold” (Hanson, 2013, p. 17). Awareness of this “stigmatized and subordinate subject position” (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 77) can cause people to lower their sense of self-worth, believe themselves to be lesser than others, and cause them to limit their goals and self-expectations. Thus, they achieve far less than they could have. They might even experience mental health issues such as depression.

## Conclusion

My first research question for my study is: How do power relations and practices produce knowledges about the purposes of community college education? The discourse analysis of practices that I performed in this chapter reveals that power/knowledge relations' goal is to have community colleges produce low- to medium-skilled workers for capitalist enterprises. To achieve this aim, it must promote the "truth" that the purpose of higher education—especially in community colleges—is job training, and the other purposes are unimportant or even a waste of time. The three practices that I analyzed produce and also circulate this knowledge in service to power's goals. This occurs through adherence to the discursive rules of vocationalism, which limit acceptable subjectivities to one: the *community college student as future worker*. Discourse ensures the attractiveness of this subjectivity through the use of normalizing judgment, the manufacture of fictional binary oppositions, and the deployment of dividing practices. Thus, my analysis also generates insights in response to my second research question: How do these relations produce and constrain subjectivities for community college students and community college faculty and other leaders?

This chapter's discussion of lived effects exposes the potential damage done to individuals who take up the *future worker* subjectivity. However, they are not the only ones who are harmed when power limits students' options to serve its interests. In the next chapter, I will discuss how community college faculty, too, become casualties in this process.

## Chapter 5: The *Workforce Developer* Subjectivity

*We must conceive discourse as a violence which we do to things...*

(Foucault, 1981, p. 67)

In Chapter 4, I presented an analysis of three practices that reveal and sustain the *community college student as future worker* subjectivity. The discourse of vocationalism seeks to limit the range of acceptable subjectivities to just one – *future worker* – because the production of “truth,” according to St. Pierre (2000), is the process of making some options impossible in service to a set of particular interests. However, the power/knowledge relations that promote job training cannot achieve their objectives by limiting students alone; they must also generate sets of desirable and undesirable subject positions for community college personnel, especially faculty. Thus, the discourse of vocationalism does “violence,” as Foucault stated in this chapter’s opening quote, by slashing the range of subjectivities for educators and administrators, cutting out the subjectivities that work against the interests of the group that benefits, and privileging one of them—the *workforce developer* subjectivity—as the only acceptable choice. When community college personnel take up this subject position, they limit what they themselves can become, reinforce students’ selection of the *future worker* subjectivity, and serve the aims of power relations, often contributing to detrimental material effects for large groups of people. Just as military operations can cause unintended harm to people or places, discourse that limits acceptable ways of being for students can cause collateral damage to the community college personnel—especially faculty—who are expected to produce *future workers*.

This chapter extends the analysis I began in Chapter 4 by focusing on how the three practices previously discussed, along with two additional practices, produce the *workforce*

*developer* subjectivity. These analyses will provide insights in response to the first two of my four research questions:

- 1) How do power relations and practices produce knowledges about the purposes of community college education?
- 2) How do these relations produce and constrain subjectivities for community college students and community college faculty and other leaders?

Chapters 6 and 7 will address my third and fourth research questions:

- 3) What are the resistances within these relations of power?
- 4) How might these points of resistance create possibilities for new discourse and practices?

### **A Review of the Aims of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis**

Before continuing my analysis of the discursive production of knowledges and subjectivities, it is useful here to reiterate that Foucauldian discourse analysis is not interested in understanding the actual things that people say or the meanings of those expressions. The expressions are merely the starting point of an analysis, which seeks to deconstruct *how* it is possible for these things to be “sayable” (Foucault, 1991a, p. 59). As Foucault (1972) put it, the point of analysis is to understand “the conditions necessary for the appearance of an object of discourse, the historical conditions required if one is to ‘say anything’ about it” (p. 44). In other words, the analytical process uncovers what the speaker is really saying but does not even know it because he or she is unaware of the culturally produced knowledges that are setting limits on what is possible to say. Analysis is about identifying what those knowledges or “rules” are, what they produce, and, thus, how discourse functions as an “instrument and an effect” of power

(Foucault, 1978a, p. 101). Thus, my aim is to discover the hidden assumptions in the discourse of vocationalism in community colleges.

As I have previously stated, my inquiry is shaped by my own subjectivities as a student of theory, an educational researcher, a community college educator and advisor, and an educational leader. Prior to my presentation and analysis of this language, therefore, I am compelled to remind readers of the subjectivities from which I undertake this analysis. As a researcher conducting a philosophically-informed, Foucauldian inquiry, I am interested in discovering how “truths” are established and maintained within a network of power, creating subjectivities that produce and constrain what people can become. I have spent the last few years as a student reading theory and seeing it come alive as I have encountered the rise of neoliberalism in higher education. As an educational leader, I am inside the structure that I critique and therefore intimate with the discourse that I both live and analyze.

### **My Selection of Practices**

My analysis is based upon five specific practices, which are the places, according to Foucault (1991b), where things are said and done. I presented the first three – a speech delivered by President Barack Obama at Macomb Community College in 2009, the mission statement of the North Carolina Community College System, and a marketing message for prospective community college students – in Chapter 4: The *Future Worker* Subjectivity. The fourth is composed of excerpts of conversation during meetings in which community college personnel, sometimes with representatives from external organizations, made plans or solved problems. The fifth is composed of excerpts of language from advising sessions with students. These excerpts come only from published texts or from conversations in which I myself was a participant. The speech was mentioned in another publication that I read, so I located the



transcript by using an online search. The mission statement is posted on the NCCCS website. The marketing message presented itself to me while I was visiting North Carolina community colleges' websites to read their mission statements. I gathered the spoken language by writing down in my journal what I heard or said in meetings or conversations from February 2019 through September 2019.

I selected these five practices—the speech, the mission statement, the marketing message, meeting notes, and advising session notes—because Foucault (1980) said that an analysis of power should not focus on “the regulated and legitimate forms of power in their central locations” but should instead “be concerned with power at its extremities, in its ultimate destinations, with those points where it comes capillary, that is, in its more regional and local forms and institutions” (p. 96). It is at these points, which are found in social practices and social relations, where discourse's mechanisms and tactics influence what people say and do to achieve the aims of power. These processes, said Foucault (1980), thus “subject our bodies, govern our gestures, dictate our behaviours, etc.” (p. 97). In other words, they produce a state of subjugation that often escapes the awareness of those who are subjugated. Therefore, an analysis must begin at the level of practices among individuals, groups, and institutions.

Also, all five practices convey “expert” discourse. According to Foucault (1978a), experts—the authority figures in society's respected professions and institutions—establish the discourses that create “regimes of truth” and produce subjectivities because the public, students, and school personnel view them as possessing the expertise necessary to generate legitimate knowledges. In the practices that I analyze, the authority figures are elected officials, college or public school administrators, college faculty, and student advisors.

A final commonality among these practices is their promulgation of the neoliberal discourse that promotes the vocationalist purpose of community college education. Although they represent national, state, and local levels of discourse as well as different sectors (government and education), they all work together to shape the dominant understanding of the community college's purpose, vocationalism, which is established as "truth." Analysis of these practices generates insights in response to the first two of my four research questions:

- 1) How do power relations and practices produce knowledges about the purposes of community college education?
- 2) How do these relations produce and constrain subjectivities for community college students and community college faculty and other leaders?

### **An Analysis of Practices**

In Chapter 4: The *Future Worker* Subjectivity, I discussed how the neoliberal discourse of capitalist enterprise has increasingly annexed the discourse of community college education. Discovering the discursive rules operating at the national, state, and local levels reveals how community college education is often presented to prospective students as job training with no mention of the other important purposes of higher education that community colleges have historically fulfilled. These practices produce not only the *future worker* subjectivity but also the *workforce developer* subjectivity. Individuals who have taken up the *workforce developer* subjectivity embody and enact the belief that community college education is job preparation. The expectations of discourse enable their choice to emphasize the vocationalist purpose of students' education; remain silent about the broader, historical purposes; and accept without question the notion that *certain* students are best suited for *certain* kinds of

jobs. These *workforce developers* are recognizable within discourse when they believe that they are helping students rise to the middle socioeconomic class through training for low- to medium-skilled jobs and when they feel proud about their role in serving their community's workforce needs. With these choices, these individuals also avoid any awareness of how their beliefs and actions might be harmful.

In the following sections, I analyze practices to reveal the discursive rules, or what Foucault (1972) called the "rules of formation" (p. 38), that constrain and enable what can (and cannot) be said. These rules establish the "truth" of the *workforce developer* subjectivity.

#### *Revisiting the Practices in Chapter 4: The Future Worker Subjectivity*

All three practices discussed in Chapter 4: *The Future Worker Subjectivity* illustrate how discourse organizes a "body of anonymous, historical rules" (Foucault, 1972, p. 117) or discursive practices, to constitute the knowledge or "truth" that community colleges are institutions whose purpose is to deliver job training. One of the rules that makes this "truth" possible is the belief that authority figures—the president of the United States, leaders of a state community college system, and the leaders of one specific community college—are experts who know what is best and act with citizens' best interests in mind. They are people who, public opinion holds, have the right to speak because they possess the right qualifications (Foucault, 1972). Another rule is the public's existing and fairly widespread perception of community colleges as predominantly vocational or technical schools. Thus, language that corroborates this belief will not be questioned. A third rule is the neoliberal ideology that permeates all of society's institutions. The discourse of neoliberalism, which equates happiness and success to material prosperity, is familiar because it is common in the media, schools, government, and capitalist enterprises. Therefore, this discourse provides fertile ground for descriptions of

educators as *workforce developers* and educational institutions at all levels as “economic engines.”

Emerging from these conditions, discourse fixes this “truth” as a norm by touting community colleges as the places to obtain new job skills and by remaining silent about their other purposes. This truth leads to normalizing judgment and dividing practices. If education at a community college is solely about job training, then the privileged subject position available to community college employees is *workforce developer*, closing down a range of other possible subject positions.

For faculty, two types of dividing practices are the result. The first creates two categories of community college faculty: *faculty who teach beneficial job skills* and *faculty who teach subjects (e.g., the humanities) that are not useful in the workplace*. In an environment where workforce development is the only goal, the faculty on the first side of this binary opposition is privileged as the more valuable contributors than the faculty on the other side. Although the North Carolina system’s applied (job-specific) associate degrees have for decades included 15 credit hours of general education requirements – an indication of these requirements’ long-standing value – these courses are now awarded more respect if they can be described in terms of what they contribute to workplace success. English and math courses, for example, are typically praised, by both employers and community college personnel, for providing a type of “job skills” that are essential for all career fields. On the other hand, courses that satisfy a degree’s humanities course requirement but do not have clear workplace connections (e.g., art appreciation, art history, music appreciation, theatre appreciation, and philosophy) are sometimes viewed by college personnel and employers as courses that one needs “to get out of the way.”

These beliefs are accepted and “sayable” because the discourse of community college vocationalism privileges courses that clearly focus on training people to be successful workers.

A second dividing practice created by the norm of community-college-education -as-job-training is *faculty who comply with the workforce developer subjectivity* and *faculty who resist by teaching their courses with broader purposes in mind*. For example, an instructor who complies with dominant discourse might teach a composition course in keeping with the prevailing “truth” and will present the course material in terms of how it will help students succeed in the workplace. For example, that instructor will remind students constantly that effective development of ideas will be essential to writing good cover letters, and grammatical correctness will be essential for their resumes. This instructor – and I myself was one of them when I served as an English instructor in the 1990s – will take up the subjectivity of *workforce developer*. In contrast, an instructor who refuses the discourse of vocationalism and teaches a composition course with the broader, historical purposes in mind will present the course material in terms of how it contributes to individual cognitive and intellectual growth as well as the public good. On the wrong side of the binary opposition, the faculty in the latter group may well be judged to be impractical or unrealistic, especially when this dividing practice intersects with the unspoken and damaging discourse of socioeconomic privilege, which holds that less should be expected of the lower-income classes, the very people who tend to become community college students. Research has revealed a common perception among educational policy makers that students of lower socioeconomic status have lower aspirations compared to their peers of higher socioeconomic status (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016). This perception, no doubt, influences educators’ behaviors in ways that bear out their expectations in self-fulfilling prophecy.

The discourse of vocationalism and its dividing practices illustrate how power/knowledge relations achieve their ends by producing a preferred subjectivity—*workforce developer*, in this case—and marginalizing or suppressing the alternatives (Weedon, 1997). This process of discursive production and constraint is necessary to constitute the subjects who will embody the beliefs and practices the discourse has gathered together to serve a particular agenda. These beliefs and practices include the notion that job training is the most important (or only) important purpose of higher education and the dismissal of courses (often in the humanities) that do not seem to have a workplace connection. According to Weedon (1997), “The political interests ... of any discourse cannot be realized without the agency of individuals who are subjectively motivated to reproduce or transform social practices and the social power that underpins them” (p. 93). The political interests of the discourse of vocationalism are the neoliberal objectives of elevating profit, economic development, materialism, and consumerism above all else. These interests cannot be realized unless community college faculty and staff step into the *workforce developer* subjectivity as professionals. In so doing, these personnel enact the discourse as they interact with others; for example, what they say and do influences students to see themselves primarily as *future workers*. Foucault (1980) put it this way:

It is...one of the prime effects of power that certain *bodies* [emphasis added], certain discourses, certain desires, come to be identified and constituted as individuals...The individual is an effect of power, and at the same time, or precisely to the extent to which it is that effect, it is the element of its articulation. The individual which power has constituted is at the same time its vehicle. (p. 98)

When faculty do comply with the prevailing discourse and step into subjectivity as professionals, though, the community college is more likely to produce workers who “up-skilled” or “re-

skilled” themselves for a specific job required by capitalist enterprise but were not encouraged to discover and develop their broader potential as *community members, citizens, artists, inventors, volunteers, humanitarians*, and so on. This result may be beneficial to business, industry, and government but can be detrimental to individuals and society as a whole by failing to encourage holistic personal development that enhances overall quality of life.

As my analysis shows, the discourse of vocationalism fashions certain “truths” for college faculty and staff, and the practices of these personnel reflect and reinforce these “truths” as well as the power relations that sustain those “truths.” The next sections continue my analysis by discussing two institutional-level practices. The first consists of “things said” (Foucault, 1991a, p. 63) at meetings in which community college leaders interact with each other and with representatives from government, public education, and corporate sectors. The second practice consists of “things said” between community college leaders and students. Investigation into a discourse’s “conditions of existence,” said Foucault, begins with the “utterances [that] are put into circulation” as well as the utterances that “have been abandoned...[or] excluded as foreign” (Foucault, 1991a, p. 60). Again, beginning with these utterances is neither a search for meaning nor an acceptance of an origin of power. Instead, in my analysis, these utterances reveal how power relations circulate to produce rules that enable and constrain those very utterances.

#### *Practices of Community College Leaders*

In this section, I analyze the practices of community college leaders, specifically what is “sayable” (Foucault, 1991a, p. 59) among this group and how it is that those things can be said. I selected four specific expressions and their close variants that I have frequently heard in educational leaders’ discussions during internal meetings and other conversations, as well as discussions with external parties such as representatives from business and industry. I define

“educational leaders” as not only personnel serving in administrative roles (e.g., presidents, vice presidents, deans, directors, department chairs, and so on) but also faculty who are leaders and authority figures to their students and their colleagues.

Although the particular moments of conversation presented here arose within one institution, they are far from unique to that institution. On the contrary, they are ubiquitous throughout community college systems across the nation, for they reflect current neoliberal notions about the relationship between education and capitalist enterprises. These expressions, or “utterances” that circulate (Foucault, 1991a), are as follows:

- “The purpose of education is to get a job.”
- “I don’t understand why young people are not coming here in droves to train for a high-paying job.”
- “You don’t need a four-year degree to get a good job.”
- “We must find out what employers need and then fill those needs.”

My analysis here is again guided by the same adaptations of Cheek’s (2008) questions for Foucauldian discourse analysis that I used in Chapter 4: The *Future Worker* Subjectivity. First, I ask, “What knowledge, realities, or “truths” are produced and constrained in this particular practice?” Next, I ask, “What discursive rules make this particular practice possible?” My third question is, “What rules say that some expressions are true while others are false?” Finally, I ask, “How is this practice being used to keep power relations circulating or to disrupt them?” These questions allow for an “ascending analysis” (Foucault, 1980, p. 99) that begins with practices and moves upward and outward to reveal power/knowledge relations at work.

An analysis driven by these questions ultimately leads to a description of the conditions that address the first two overarching questions of my inquiry:



1) How do power relations and practices produce knowledges about the purposes of community college education? and

2) How do these relations produce and constrain subjectivities for community college students and community college faculty and other leaders?

**“The purpose of education is to get a job.”** In the nine months that I have been noting details about practices in my journal, this assertion, or another version of it—“Everything we do here is workforce development”—has been made in all of the following places: a meeting for the purpose of planning an open house event for high school seniors considering community college enrollment; a meeting for the purpose of determining the marketing and recruitment techniques most effective for boosting enrollment; and a meeting for the purpose of expanding career and technical education in high schools. Not only is it frequently verbalized by both internal and external constituents of the community college, but it is also always operating as an unspoken given in the practices of community college leaders. Its function is to privilege just one purpose of education: job training. According to the discursive rules that make this statement sayable, the broader, historical purposes of education no longer even exist. Discourse has relegated them to the category of “subjugated knowledges” (Foucault, 2003) because they are either extraneous or oppositional to power relations’ goals.

What discursive rules make this particular expression possible? This expression emerges, of course, from pervasive neoliberal beliefs about the relationship between education and employment. For four decades, U.S. citizens have been steeped in an ideology (transmitted by the discourses of education, capitalist enterprises, government, and family and community relations) that hopes to convince everyone that job preparation is the most important purpose of all academic endeavors. When it is spoken by educational leaders, this expression gains

additional credibility as “the way things are.” A final discursive rule that allows this expression is the general public’s unexpressed, perhaps unconscious disdain for the pursuit of knowledge and intellectual development. Today, something is worth learning only if it has a clearly utilitarian purpose or brings economic rewards. As the CIRP Freshman Survey data shows, the percentage of college freshmen who identify the goal of “being very well off financially” as essential or very important has risen from 42.2% in 1966 to 73.4 in 2006 while the proportion of students who rate the goal of “developing a meaningful philosophy of life” as essential or very important has plummeted: from 85.8% of freshmen in 1967 to a 40-year low of 39.3% in 2003 (Pryor, Hurtado, Saenz, Santos, & Korn, 2007, pp. 32-33).

This discourse fixes the norm of the vocationalist purpose of higher education. When everyone agrees that job preparation is the sole reason to attend a community college, dividing practices are used to bolster that norm. Personnel, activities, and infrastructure are deemed to be vital to workforce development – or not. Wanting to stay on the “good side” of the binary opposition, community college employees comply by talking and acting in ways that show their support for the preferred agenda. For example, when a student who is lamenting the difficulty of a biology class asks his advisor, “Why do I have to take science for this degree? I’ll never need it or use it,” the advisor typically responds with something along the lines of “It’s helping you develop critical thinking skills that will be important in your career.” When education is viewed as job training and other purposes have been eliminated, it is no longer even conceivable to explain to the student that studying science helps us deepen our understanding of our relationship to the natural world so that we will know how to protect and live in harmony with our environment. This response is in keeping with the personal development and public good purposes of higher education that vocationalism either minimizes or silences

altogether. Dividing practices that privilege the learning-as-preparation-for-work perspective ensure that anyone who voices a silenced perspective is viewed as aberrant. This result is why dividing practices are an essential mechanism of power relations.

In power relations, the broader purposes of higher education are not only unnecessary to achieving the goal of producing workers but also potentially oppositional to that goal; therefore, discourse must exclude these purposes. When the discourse of vocationalism privileges job training, the obvious beneficiaries are capitalist enterprises, which get the trained workers they need. Educational institutions, too, are rewarded with the continued support of business, industry, and government officials who make economic development their number one priority. Community college faculty and other personnel, however, may experience subjugation via the *workforce developer* subjectivity that results in an incomplete education for their students.

**“I don’t understand why young people are not coming here in droves to train for a high-paying job.”** This expression typically arises in conversations of community college leaders who are trying to determine how to reverse declining enrollment trends at the same time that local employers, such as manufacturers and construction companies, have unfilled needs for trained workers. In one such meeting attended by various administrative personnel, a review of a disappointing enrollment report was immediately followed by a discussion of how the community college could reach the county’s recent high school graduates who had “disappeared,” meaning they chose not to pursue any form of postsecondary education. To those assembled, this situation was a “problem” because of research indicating that the majority of jobs with decent wages now require at least two years of college education or some other form of postsecondary training. The group then turned to a discussion of the reasons why hundreds of

high school graduates were choosing not to further their education. Attendees speculated about why this was occurring, offering possible reasons that included all of the following: (a) high school graduates' lack of information about their opportunities, (b) laziness or lack of motivation on the part of young people, (c) parents' enabling of their children's bad choices, (d) unrealistic expectations about career goals.

The first reason is the only one that community colleges can do something about, so the discussion moved to specific ways that college personnel could improve their outreach. Notice, however, that the other three reasons, in true neoliberal fashion, all blame young people or their parents for the personal flaws causing their "failure" to take advantage of programs that train for better jobs. There is also an underlying – but unexpressed – sense of annoyance that the absent youth are stymieing the community colleges' efforts to provide the trained workers that local business and industry has been pressuring them for. This annoyance (which is conveyed when leaders, in an exasperated tone, make comments such as, "I've got contractors practically *begging* me to get more people into our construction program") reveals the *workforce developer* subject position of college personnel. These personnel have been made to feel responsible for producing graduates who are trained for jobs; as a result, they feel distress when they perceive that their goals are being thwarted. When the leaders of education programs are pressured by local business and industry and by their own institution to recruit students, and those students fail to materialize, these leaders' frustration makes it easy for them to assume that the uncooperative young people are uninformed, unmotivated, coddled, or impractical. Administrators may also blame faculty, concluding that they are not working hard enough to recruit for their programs.

This negative assessment – which occurs with no information about the circumstances and current activities and prospects of high school graduates who choose not to continue their

education – is rooted in neoliberal views that measure success in life according to economic outcomes alone. Although many or most of these “missing” young people are likely to be employed, if they are not striving to increase their skills and their income, they are making “bad” choices for their lives. Another discursive rule that makes this expression possible is the neoliberal insistence on creating “responsibilized subjects” (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 73). According to this viewpoint, people are completely responsible for their good and bad life choices. Structural factors, which include circumstances such as poverty, racism, quality of public schools, and discrimination, in no way reduce that responsibility even though studies indicate that these factors are highly influential (Bailey & Morest, 2006; Dougherty, 1994).

This discourse of vocationalism, intersecting with the discourse of neoliberalism, thus creates the norm that one must educate himself or herself for better job prospects and higher income. Normalizing judgment pronounces anyone who is doing something different to be derelict or non-compliant. Dividing practices, such as those articulated in meetings of deans, directors, and other administrators, create the binary opposition of *people training for better jobs and higher income* and *people who do not seek training*, with the latter group judged to be outside the norm and, therefore, wrong. The sole criteria for judgment, however, is based on economic factors rather than other equally important factors, such as quality of life and human happiness. On behalf of the power it serves, discourse excludes these additional factors to make certain choices not only undesirable but even impossible. Foucault (1980) wrote that “truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint” (p. 131). With regard to community college purposes, the acceptable options must be reduced to only those options that serve power’s goals. If this constraint does not happen, and the factors that are the basis for judgment are not limited to economic criteria, it no longer makes sense to condemn

individuals based on their alternative life paths. For example, it no longer makes sense to negatively assess a high school graduate who chooses to go to work in a family business instead of going to college or someone who chooses to rebuild his confidence outside of an academic environment that damaged his sense of self-worth. It also no longer makes sense to criticize someone who chooses to pursue a talent or hobby. When the choice of subjectivities expands, however, power loses its ability to subjugate individuals toward its ends.

This practice of negatively assessing those who do not pursue job training, which is born of discourse that has been annexed by neoliberalism, sustains power relations by inculcating in community college personnel the idea that their role is workforce development. When college faculty and staff accept the *workforce developer* subjectivity for themselves, they become subjects whose sole purpose is to generate workers. Having taken up this position, these personnel become the “embodied subjects” that discourse requires for its activation (Weedon, 1997, p. 108). In their recruiting practices, these individuals will emphasize the educational programs that feed local job openings. They may both worry about and judge harshly the people who do not respond to their message of education as the path to prosperity. They may feel compelled to discourage alternative ways of being that have been downplayed or eliminated by the discourse. Thus, these faculty and staff will demonstrate Foucault’s (1980) point that an individual formed by power relations will continue to circulate that power.

**“You don’t need a four-year degree to get a good job.”** Other versions include “Many associate degree graduates earn more than bachelor degree graduates” and “Scores of bachelor’s degree graduates have to complete a community college degree to obtain a decent job.” These “truths” often arise in the practices of community college leaders who seek to recruit new students. Expressions like these are designed to promote and reinforce the idea that a community

college education is valuable in the labor market. Consequently, these are the messages that become prominent in community college leaders' communications with prospective students. It is important to realize, though, that the knowledge being asserted here is that community college education is now *preferable* to a university-level higher education—at least for a certain group of people.

What discursive rules make the emergence of these expressions possible? Once again, there is the rule about the established relationship between education and capitalist enterprise. Education prepares people for work. A second rule is that it is acceptable to advance these “truths” even when they are based upon weak, contradictory, incomplete, or cherry-picked data. For instance, in 2018, only 7% of the nation's community college students held a bachelor's degree or higher (American Association of Community Colleges, 2018), and the current unemployment rate for bachelor's degree graduates is only 2.2% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). While it is true that some of these graduates may be underemployed in positions that do not require a college degree, this data seems to cast some doubt upon the assertion that many graduates of four-year institutions cannot find work until they obtain job training at a community college. Similarly, charts of average income correlated to higher education attainment always show the median earnings of those with bachelor's degrees to be higher than those with associate's degrees (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019), undermining the argument that “many” associate degree graduates earn more.

Why then, in a higher education environment that typically values the use of quality research for supporting claims, are misleading assertions based on questionable supporting evidence being made? An analysis of additional rules suggests how educators who are subjugated in a neoliberal environment must rationalize and justify what their chosen subject

position requires them to do. Educators are people who choose to enter a helping profession in exchange for relatively low pay because they enjoy and find meaning and satisfaction in working to help others grow and develop. In an environment that requires them to focus almost solely on economic development, faculty need to believe that what they are doing will help students. They are aware that most of the students who excel in high school go on to universities. They have also accepted the “truth” that, for the students whose academic performance in high school was poor and the students who do not have a clear career path, a two-year community college education will provide productive employment and, for lower socioeconomic classes, an increase in status. Educators need to believe that these young people will, at the very least, obtain “a good job,” so they are eager to propagate the knowledge that community college education is better or preferable for this group.

Two even more unsavory discursive rules – always unspoken – provide the favorable conditions for this practice of promoting community college education as preferable for some people. One of them is an acknowledgement that the local workforce needs these future workers, so students should not be encouraged to think too broadly about the world and their place in it. If they do, they might pursue other opportunities, low- to medium-skilled jobs might go unfilled, and employers might take their companies away to other communities, even other countries. President Barack Obama said as much in a 2009 speech (see Chapter 4: *The Future Worker* Subjectivity), indicating that this threat is always looming.

We know that in the coming years, jobs requiring at least an associate degree are projected to grow twice as fast as jobs requiring no college experience. We will not fill those jobs – *or even keep those jobs here in America* [emphasis added] – without the training offered by community colleges. (Obama, 2009)



In his warning that under-educated Americans will need a community college education to get a job, another unsaid warning lurks: these jobs may be in danger of being moved overseas if too many people come to recognize a broader array of options for themselves. If businesses leave and take jobs with them, community college personnel may lose *their* jobs. The safest course of action for faculty, then, is to function as *workforce developers* and to achieve the objectives of power by doing all they can to get businesses the workers they need. Thus, the discourse makes preferable a subject position that discourages individuals from aiming too high. Everyone in the community college—from students to faculty—then begins to think smaller and smaller. Students narrow their beliefs about themselves and what they can achieve. Faculty narrow their beliefs about who they are, what they do, and what their students are capable of doing.

The other discursive rule at work is that less should be expected of people who do not distinguish themselves in high school because their lackluster performance showed that they are not as smart, not as motivated, not as ambitious, and so on. This rule, which becomes apparent in conversations among educators at all levels (K-12 through higher education) who are critical of low-achieving students, is especially troubling because structural factors, such as socioeconomic status, family values and resources, and school quality, are often significant determinants of individuals' academic performance. These factors are also indicative of one's academic future, as one disturbing fact makes clear: Tough (2014) shows that college graduation now seems to depend on how much money a student's parents make. The children of wealthier families complete college at a much higher rate than the children of lower socioeconomic classes. According to Sullivan (2017), "largely unseen social, cultural, political, and economic forces" affect an individual's choices that lead to success or failure (p. 206). In a neoliberal mindset that subjugates us all, however, such factors are irrelevant, and individuals alone are

responsible for their failure to reveal their own potential during childhood and adolescence. Educators are thus justified in believing in a kind of predestination for these students because those students' alleged shortcomings create the need for wiser educators to make good decisions *for* them.

Taken together, these discursive rules illustrate Foucault's point that power never takes the form of domination by an individual or group over others. Instead, power is something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localised here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation. (Foucault, 1980, p. 98)

Power does not emanate from a central point. It is always circulating in social relations — in this case, among educators, administrators, students, parents, government officials, employers. Power, Foucault (1978a) said, “comes from everywhere” (p. 93).

The discourse of vocationalism maintains a disturbing norm: people who did not do well in high school or have not yet formed clear goals are best suited for community college programs that fill gaps in the local workforce, and they should be steered in that direction. Normalizing judgment says that these programs are where these students “belong,” so educators should help them focus on that narrowed range of opportunities. Having taken up the *workforce developer* subject position, these educators activate the discourse by encouraging “low performers” to choose two years of pure job training. Despite the fact that an individual's performance in high school is often in no way indicative of his or her overall potential, dividing practices have created categories based on prior academic record and current goals, and the vocational track will typically include little or no discussion about the broader purposes of a college education. The entire education system from preschool through college forms a “net-like

organisation” that creates artificial and restricting categories for people and urges them to base their choice of subject position on the category to which they have been relegated. The practices of educators at all levels mesh to sustain a net pushing low-performing students of low socioeconomic status into training for relatively lower-wage jobs.

This practice of describing community college education as preferable to a university education achieves the goals of power relations of government, capitalist enterprise, and education within a neoliberal climate. Capitalist enterprises require trained workers, and community colleges are expected to recruit and train those people. In this environment, only the vocationalist purpose of higher education is relevant. The other two broad, historical purposes – personal development and maintenance of the public good – become not only useless but also counterproductive to power relations’ aims, for students educated toward those purposes may become aware of other talents, interests, or goals that take them beyond employment in the low- to medium-skill jobs where they are needed.

**“We must find out what employers need and then fill those needs.”** This expression asserts the “truth” that education is subservient to capitalist enterprises and unequivocally relegates community colleges to a vocationalist purpose. It expresses a total lack of interest in a broader education that prepares citizens for all of their different roles in life.

One discursive rule that makes this practice possible is the neoliberalism that pervades society’s institutions. According to neoliberal principles, the purpose of education is job preparation. Another rule is based upon a determination to avoid the disastrous job losses that occurred in the wake of the Great Recession of 2007-2009. As businesses closed and citizens lost their jobs and income, individuals and communities suffered. Leaders in government, education, and capitalist enterprises saw first-hand the devastation that was caused when

employers were forced to close their doors, and these leaders feel significant pressure now to make sure that the companies in their area have the trained personnel they need to stay in operation.

Out of these conditions arises the norm that community colleges' role is to recruit and train future workers. If the numbers of students in their programs are too low, faculty are viewed as failing the college, failing local employers, and failing lower socioeconomic citizens who need training that will boost their income. These norms move the other broader purposes of higher education to the realm of "subjugated knowledges" (Foucault, 2003, p. 7) and create the *community college student as future worker* subjectivity for students and the *workforce developer* subjectivity for community college personnel, especially faculty. Normalizing judgment and dividing practices will ensure that anyone who steps outside these roles will be criticized and pressured to adopt a more compliant subject position. College personnel who do not comply may be judged to be uncaring, difficult, or lax in fulfilling their responsibilities.

One particular meeting I attended put these power/knowledge relations on stark display. In a gathering of community college personnel, public school personnel, and representatives from business and industry, the meeting began with those in attendance taking turns introducing themselves to the group. One outspoken representative of a local manufacturer introduced herself and then proceeded to announce that her purpose in joining this group was to tell the public school and the community college what kinds of employees must be produced for her company so that it would continue generating a billion dollars in annual sales. During her remarks, she also said – not once but *twice* – that the entry-level positions at her company paid more than the salary of anyone in that room. The implication was that the jobs at her company were so important that cultivating the right people for them should be the school systems'

priority. Her speech was met with polite silence, and the introductions continued. Many people in that room probably felt as insulted as I did, for she lowered our status to inferiors who labor in service to the needs of her employer rather than our students. Nevertheless, no one contradicted her. The discourse of vocationalism as the privileged purpose of education allowed her to say what she said and prevented the rest of us from objecting, at least in a public setting.

This industry representative bluntly revealed the power relations at work, the ones that are rarely exposed and, therefore, not apparent or acknowledged. Capitalist enterprises dictate their personnel needs, and educators are expected to do whatever they can to fill those needs. In their subjugated position of *workforce developers*, educational institutions stay in the place that has been defined for them and remain silent – even when doing so is detrimental to the students they serve. This occurs because discourse has constituted “the minds and bodies of individuals” (Weedon, 1997, p. 105). Just as Foucault (1978a) described in *The History of Sexuality* how the discourse of 18th century science applied a process of “hysterization” to female bodies, turning “the Mother” into the “nervous woman” and contributing to “patriarchal subjection of women” (p. 104), the discourse of vocationalism creates the norm of community college education as job training and turns faculty into *workforce developers* who produce *future workers*. This discourse allows capitalist enterprises to treat community college personnel as factory workers who are making products (future workers) to employers’ specifications. The result can be anti-democratic suppression of lower socioeconomic classes as well as collateral damage to community college faculty. These negative effects are discussed in the “Lived Effects” section at the end of this chapter.

Both the educators who are outraged by the expectation that their job is to churn out workers for corporate interests and the educators who choose to accept their assigned role are

subject to a discourse. In defining its preferred subjectivities, though, a discourse will also “imply other subject positions and the possibility of reversal” (Weedon, 1997, p. 106). These alternatives are discussed in Chapter 7: Multiplying Subjectivities.

### *Practices of Advisors Interacting with Students*

Power/knowledge relations constantly circulate, creating the *workforce subjectivity* for educators, and educators, guided by a discourse of community college purposes that allows them to say some things but not others, engage in practices that perpetuate and reinforce this subjectivity. From this subject position, educators say things to students that then affect *their* choice of subject positions. This is why Foucault (1972) described discourse as having “ponderous, awesome materiality” (p. 216). In *The History of Sexuality* (1978a), he explained how a “steady proliferation of discourses,” beginning in the 18th century, “tracked down” and took charge of sex, resulting in new subjectivities, new objects, and new power/knowledge relations (pp. 18, 20, 104-105). By power/knowledge relations, Foucault (1980) meant that the ability to influence the actions of others depends upon the production and circulation of “truth.” This is how the discourse associated with community college purposes controls even what people believe they can become. To illustrate this, I offer one final practice consisting of things that I, acting in the role of academic advisor, have said to community college students during advising sessions.

As an educator and advisor (which is, in my view, also a type of educator), I have always wanted to convey to students the value of a broader education in hopes of contributing not only to their workplace success but also to their success in all other spheres of their lives. My goal is to inspire all of the students with whom I interact to see college as the place where they can develop themselves holistically and to recognize the many benefits of doing so.

Consequently, it came as a great shock to me when, as I began this research project, I heard myself saying things to my advisees that directly contradicted my stated goals. I realized that, at times, I spoke as an advocate of broad education. For example, I would encourage students to select courses that allowed them to explore their interests and develop their talents. At other times, though, I would speak from a different subjectivity, the product of the discourse of vocationalism, which views all community college education as workforce development. These shifts in my own subjectivities and my unconscious undermining of my own beliefs due to exposure to the vocationalist message demonstrate the ongoing discursive struggle for subjectivity and the opposing subject positions that an individual can inhabit at different times (Weedon, 1997). In Chapter 4: *The Future Worker Subjectivity*, in my discussion of a state-level mission statement, I said that the discourse that allows this statement influences advising practices at the most intimate local level. Thus, I illustrate Foucault's (1991a) point that the social practices and language of people "obey rules which are not given to their consciousness" (p. 71).

For one thing, I have many times launched an advising session with a student, after initial introductions, with the question "What is your career goal?" This approach seems appropriate enough. No doubt many advisors begin there because the objectives of an advising session include guiding students as they complete their coursework, and we assume that students want those credits or degrees because they intend to pursue jobs or bachelor's degree programs. To achieve this objective, we must ascertain, first of all, the match between the student's academic program and career goal. However, helping students navigate through programs or courses is just one of *several* objectives that advisors should accomplish. Others include fostering a sense of belonging and connection to the institution and establishing a rapport that will grow into a

collaborative relationship between advisor and advisee. Focusing only on how the student's higher education experience will serve as preparation for a career is a failure to serve the student as a whole person.

What knowledge, realities, or "truths" are being offered in this particular practice, bound to relations of power? If we start the conversation with the person's career goal and bypass getting to know that person as an individual who is embarking upon an important period of self-development, we have, from the very beginning of the advisor-advisee relationship, reduced the student to a worker and limited the role of the community college to workforce development. We also lose the opportunity to discover and nurture students' interests and talents because we never knew that those interests and talents existed. Thus, we promote the belief that the student is there solely for job training, and we contribute to the goal of power relations that privilege vocationalism in community college education. In this way, we demonstrate Foucault's (1980) points that power attaches to the "truths" circulating in discourse and that individuals exercise this power when they draw on these "truths" in their social relations (Foucault, 1978a).

The discursive rules making this practice possible include the common knowledge that obtaining a college degree is essential to getting a "good job" and the widespread emphasis on community colleges' role in job preparation, as well as employees' acceptance of this role. In addition, students view advisors as experts and authority figures who can be trusted to guide them; therefore, students look to advisors as a source of "truth." These relations illustrate Foucault's (1980) assertion that power produces knowledge and vice versa. When advisors act according to the knowledges being circulated in a particular discourse, they have been "subjected to the production of truth through power," and when those advisors subsequently act upon the



actions of others, they demonstrate that “we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth” (Foucault, 1980, p. 93).

What rules say that some expressions are true while others are false? As previous discussions have shown, when we uphold and reinforce the norm that says students are there only to train for jobs, we create the binary opposition of *community college student as future worker* and *community college student pursuing a broad education*, with the former being preferred and the latter judged to be impractical, silly, pretentious, or unrealistic, not just by the people whose goal is local workforce development but by anyone who has been influenced by neoliberal discourse—which means everyone.

Thus, power relations are supported by our practice because we have reinforced the dominant discourse on community college purposes and participated in the process of turning students into *workers* and advisors into *workforce developers*. Chapter 7: Multiplying Subjectivities includes a discussion of possible alternative advising practices that open up a wider range of subjectivities for students and faculty.

This same analysis applies to the way that I have contradicted my own belief in the broader purposes of education by describing general education requirements as courses that the student needs to “knock out” or “get out of the way.” In North Carolina, all two-year associate in applied science (non-transfer) degree programs include 15 credit hours of general education courses from the communications, humanities, social sciences, mathematics, and science disciplines. I consider this set of courses to be vitally important in degree programs that prepare students to enter the workforce after 64 to 76 credit hours of mostly career-oriented coursework, for they provide opportunities for students’ holistic development. Yet, I have referred to them using language that indicates their *lack* of importance and their status as educational experiences

that need to be dispensed with so that students can move on their job training experiences. I myself have illustrated St. Pierre's (2000) point that

once a discourse becomes "normal" or "natural," it is difficult to think and act outside it. Within the rules of a discourse, it makes sense to say only certain things. Other statements and ways of thinking remain unintelligible, outside the realm of possibility. (p. 485)

With the pervasiveness of the dominant discourse of vocationalism, it is normal and natural to undermine the broader, historical purposes and privilege the vocationalist purpose.

So, if a community college dean who advocates for the broader purposes of higher education can fall into these traps, what about other advisors? Based on my informal conversations with advisors of applied science degree programs, I can infer that many of them focus only on preparation for a job in the local workforce and never mention pursuing non-career-related personal development, citizenship development, or education beyond an associate's degree. The discourse of vocationalism has not only silenced these goals as worthy of attention but also steeps faculty in a neoliberal environment in which their value depends, to a large extent, on their program headcount. Consequently, they become reluctant to encourage students' other interests lest those students realize they want to pursue alternative goals. Even transfer program advisors tend to focus only on getting students to the baccalaureate-level majors that they will need to achieve their career goal. They, too, are silent about the broader purposes of community college education, thus reinforcing the notion that our sole purpose is to help our students obtain good jobs. When we do, we think that we have been helpful. Discourse, however, has been determining what can and cannot be said (Foucault, 1972). We do not realize

the script running in the background, the one that says we are developing workers and influences us to speak in ways that lead others to limit their sense of their own possibility.

### *Lived Effects*

Practices and the subjectivities they generate are responsible for “lived effects,” or significant impacts on the ways people live their lives (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, pp. 23, 108). Faculty, like students, are affected in real, material ways (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016) when *workforce developer* is the preferred subjectivity for them.

First of all, reducing higher education to job training undercuts the educational philosophies and the higher ideals and values that faculty bring to their profession. Faculty within all disciplines tend to be educators who want their students to develop holistically and achieve the broader goals of higher education. Based on my observation, some will continue striving to facilitate this kind of development even in an environment that values only economic outcomes; however, they may also lose some of their idealism, eroding their enthusiasm for their work. If they feel that their contributions are not seen as valuable as those who teach job-related skills, they may even feel demoralized.

At the other end of the spectrum in a neoliberal-influenced educational environment, other faculty will emphasize job-skills training courses as more important than at least some general education courses. They may not describe this general education as worthless, but neither will they describe it as worthwhile. Their silence will indicate to students these courses’ overall lack of usefulness. Other faculty may be so focused on maintaining the highest standards of their profession that they will not concern themselves with anything else their students are becoming besides perfect practitioners. In both cases, students are in danger of receiving only an incomplete education. When the broader purposes of higher education are not promoted, anyone

who permanently leaves higher education with an associate's degree or earned credits but no degree may accept the *worker* subjectivity and limit his or her broader potential. When the broader purposes of higher education are not promoted, anyone who permanently leaves higher education with an associate's degree or earned credits but no degree may have accepted the *worker* subjectivity that can limit his or her potential.

In educational settings where there is extreme emphasis on vocationalism, faculty may be made to feel as though their role is akin to that of factory workers with production goals. In these settings, even educators will begin to refer to their colleges as “pipelines” to the local workforce. Faculty, as *workforce developers*, are held responsible for recruiting new students; their supervisors may judge these instructors' job performance as deficient if their program enrollment falls short of desired benchmarks. They are also responsabilized for producing graduates who then become the workers required by capitalist enterprises. To achieve this goal, administrators and faculty get students through their programs, in part, by cutting out the “fluff”—material that does not contribute to the development of job skills—whenever possible. Everyone involved is threatened with replacement and job loss if they under-perform, so career and technical education faculty may become extremely reluctant to promote broad education; their students might decide to leave their program to pursue an alternate path.

In this pressure-cooker environment, real friction can arise between career and technical education faculty and general education faculty. If a student in a welding program, for example, is struggling in an English course required in his or her program of study, welding faculty may perceive the English faculty as an obstacle to the accomplishment of their “production goals,” which leads to conflict between instructors.

When producing workers becomes the institution's sole or most important goal, faculty may believe that the safest route is to accept and obey the acceptable discursive rules and focus on workforce development. In doing so, they minimize negative consequences for themselves; however, when they stop seeing *themselves* as broadly educated professionals and focus on job skills training, they may begin to see themselves, erroneously, as smaller than they really are. They may shy away from certain subjectivities, such as *mentor* or *lifelong learner*, that could complement their *workforce developer* subjectivity, thereby limiting their own options and reducing their quality of life. In turn, they may refrain from sharing their own experiences and accumulated wisdom with students, thus robbing students of interactions that could contribute to their own broad education.

Another side effect of vocationalism for all community college faculty, regardless of discipline, can be a lack of support and encouragement for their own educational goals. When faculty are seen as *workforce developers* who are training students for low- to medium-skilled jobs, their own academic aspirations may be dismissed as unnecessary for their roles. In the past, more than one person has asked me, "Why are you pursuing a doctoral degree? Do you need that for your job?" Education that is not required for employment is viewed as a waste of time and resources. When community college faculty are viewed predominantly as job trainers, those who have earned graduate degrees that are unnecessary for their positions may even be thought of as "over-educated" for their role. This message is reinforced when anyone says, "You don't need a four-year degree to get a good job," which I discussed earlier in this chapter. Although this statement typically refers to young people who are entering higher education, its subtext also calls into question the need for anyone to pursue advanced degrees that do not lead to "better" jobs and financial gains.

Even worse, all of these various side effects work together to lower the status of community college faculty and contribute to a loss of respect for their profession and their work. These individuals help their fellow human beings realize their full potential; consequently, their efforts should be valued and appreciated.

## **Conclusion**

To achieve the interests of the specific groups it serves, the discourse of vocationalism seeks to convince community college faculty and other leaders that the purpose of community college education is job training and that community college personnel, especially faculty, are *workforce developers*. These are the two “truths,” or knowledges, that emerged in my analysis of practices, which also explored how the desirability of this norm and the *workforce developer* subject position are maintained through the use of normalizing judgment, binary oppositions, and dividing practices. Thus, my analysis produced insights in response to two of my research questions:

- 1) How do power relations and practices produce knowledges about the purposes of community college education?
- 2) How do these relations produce and constrain subjectivities for community college students and community college faculty and other leaders?

By obeying the rules of the discourse of vocationalism, community college personnel, especially faculty, serve the goals of power/knowledge relations that wish to narrow the purposes of community college education to job training.

However, not everyone agrees with this agenda, and many actively oppose it. In the next chapter, I deconstruct the practices to describe the “points of resistance” that adhere to a different

discourse—the discourse of comprehensive education—and seek to open up possibilities that power relations have erased. This is the goal of the *agent of challenge* subjectivity.

## Chapter 6: The *Agent of Challenge* Subjectivity

*Agency [is] ... a fascination with the capacity to create new life-forms, life-forms capable of disrupting old meanings..., even potentially overwriting or eclipsing them.*

(Davies & Gannon, 2005, p. 319)

In Chapters 4 and 5, I analyzed how power/knowledge relations and the dominant discourse of vocationalism produces the *community college student as future worker* subjectivity for students and the *workforce developer* subjectivity for community college personnel. These subjectivities are created using tactics and techniques that make it seem as though one's options are limited, even when they are not. As Foucault put it, "People are much freer than they feel" (as cited in St. Pierre, 2000, p. 493) because they can always confront any "truth" and reject its premises. Questioning or undermining a dominant discourse that is wedded to power and offering a competing or "reverse discourse" (Foucault, 1978a, p. 101) is the work of those who embody resistance. In resisting, they "create new life-forms," as the opening quote for this chapter states, by taking up a subjectivity that Weedon (1997) refers to as the *agent of challenge*.

In this chapter, I first describe the subjectivities that are constrained or silenced by the power relations that circulate within the discourse of vocationalism. Then, I explain Foucault's concept of resistance and how it is embodied and enacted by the *agent of challenge* subjectivity. Finally, I analyze the points of resistance in power relations and examine how they revive subjugated knowledges and silenced subjectivities. In restoring "utterances" that have been "abandoned" or "excluded as foreign" (Foucault, 1991a, p. 60), these points of resistance



open back up the range of available subject positions that power has attempted to narrow. This analysis generates insights in response to the last two of my four research questions:

- 1) How do power relations and practices produce knowledges about the purposes of community college education?
- 2) How do these relations produce and constrain subjectivities for community college students and community college faculty and other leaders?
- 3) What are the resistances within these relations of power?
- 4) How might these points of resistance create possibilities for new discourse and practices?

I addressed the first two questions in Chapters 4 and 5.

### **Silenced Subjectivities and the *Agent of Challenge* Subjectivity**

As I established in Chapters 4 and 5, the discourse of vocationalism establishes preferred subjectivities. In so doing, it silences other subjectivities; in other words, it either excludes them from consideration or actively opposes them. Before I discuss how resistances function within these power relations, it will be helpful to understand the constrained subjectivities that resistances seek to revive.

Some of these subjectivities are silenced because they are of little value to power relations interested only in producing workers for capitalist enterprise. For community college students, these silenced subjectivities include *citizen of a democracy*, *engaged community member*, *humanitarian*, *artist*, and *lifelong learner*. When the discursive goal is to create workers, these other life roles may be passively silenced through neglect: they are rarely or never spoken of in the contexts of marketing and recruiting efforts, administrative decision-making, advising sessions, and so on; therefore, they are never presented as possible subject positions. If

these other important roles *are* spoken of, they may be dismissed as less important than roles related to economic activity and not worthy of inhabiting unless they can somehow be tied to economic activity. For example, artists who sell their work and citizens who win elections to become salaried politicians are both recognized in a discourse that privileges financial profit. A person who pursues an additional college degree for personal enrichment and intellectual challenge rather than material benefits, however, may be unrecognizable. He or she may even be criticized for wasting time and money. When discourse has been annexed by neoliberal principles, subjectivities that are unrelated to financial gain no longer hold a privileged position.

Other subjectivities are counterproductive to power relations' aims and, therefore, dangerous. The *student seeking a broad education* subjectivity, for example, can be seen as the opposite of the *community college student as future worker* subjectivity. Thus, according to Foucault (1980, 1981), discourse must exclude it as a possibility, assuring that it will be denigrated through normalizing judgment and dividing practices, as I explained in Chapters 4 and 5 of this dissertation. Thus, power/knowledge relations create new subjectivities with more privileged positions in relation to an Other: worker/learner, worker/artist, worker/humanitarian. There seems to be little room for negotiating a fluid subjectivity in this discourse.

Silencing these subjectivities, as well as failing to help American citizens of lower socioeconomic classes develop these broader roles, has obvious detrimental effects for society overall, such as undeveloped talent, a decline in quality of life, and a lower sense of self-worth (see the "Lived Effects" sections in Chapters 4 and 5 of this dissertation). In addition, narrowing education to job training may also be fueling doubts about the value of going to college (Lederman, 2017). If that value is presented only in economic terms, and people believe that

thinking any more than one's job requires is a waste of time, then the price tag for a higher education often seems much too high.

Community college faculty, too, have a set of silenced subjectivities. Power relations that encourage these faculty to inhabit the *workforce developer* subjectivity may see the *scholar of a discipline* subjectivity as having little value. While it is true that community college faculty serve primarily as instructors and are not expected to engage in the level of scholarship expected of university faculty, many of them – including those who teach courses that transfer to universities – earned a master's degree in their field of study and consider themselves to be scholars of that discipline. Some even conduct research, publish articles in academic journals, and keep abreast of the scholarship in their field—or the field of education—by attending conferences, taking courses, and reading. These activities, which expand the scope and depth of faculty members' knowledge of their field, often enhance their instruction of students. However, in an environment that privileges worker preparation over knowledge acquisition and intellectual development, these activities may not be seen as useful and may not be supported. For example, an institutional leader may deny support to faculty who wish to attend a humanities-related conference because humanities fields typically focus only on the two broader purposes of higher education (personal development and maintenance of the public good) rather than workforce development. In addition, there may be little encouragement or compensation for earning additional college degrees that are not “necessary” for a community college faculty position; in fact, this additional education may even be counterproductive to a discourse that wants faculty to see themselves as workforce trainers rather than scholars. Completing a doctoral degree, in particular, is not required for community college instructors, so they may even be discouraged from pursuing that level of education.

For faculty, two additional subjectivities are silenced because they can be counterproductive to power relations' objectives and, therefore, dangerous. One of them is *holistic educator*. An individual who inhabits this subjectivity seeks to expose students to new information and ideas; to challenge them to develop their critical thinking, creative thinking, and problem-solving skills; and to inspire them to positively contribute to their communities and the world. For centuries, these have been the goals of higher education in general. However, in an environment that primarily values economic outcomes, these broader outcomes may be dismissed as unimportant; others may be viewed as useful only to the extent that they are needed on the job.

The other potentially problematic subjectivity that is silenced is *advocate for social justice*. Community college personnel tend to be proud of their role in helping society's more disadvantaged citizens improve their lives and future prospects. Because of our neoliberal environment, we have absorbed the belief that we have achieved this goal when these people complete their training for a low- to medium-skilled job. We tell ourselves that now, they will be much better off than they were. Foucault (1978a) would say that this is an example of the "anonymous" strategies and tactics that no one individual or group invented or controls; nevertheless, these tactics come to be seen as logical and true, allowing "the caste which governs" to use them to achieve its aims (p. 95). In a society divided into unequal socioeconomic classes, that governing caste consists of upper-socioeconomic capitalists who need semi-skilled workers—and consumers. This caste can invoke the promise of upward socioeconomic mobility, which has been a core American belief for centuries, as a tactic to influence people to limit their own options and choose a subject position that may foreclose other paths to happiness and success.

Advocating for social justice, however, entails promoting more than a job-skills-based education that will produce a slight socioeconomic boost. It means advocating for citizens from all walks of life to have access to education that develops their intellect and their broad cultural knowledge so that they, too, are encouraged to develop themselves to their *highest* potential. According to Hanson (2013),

we have a moral duty to provide [disadvantaged groups such as women, minorities, and low-income citizens] with an education of the same nature that we find in elite institutions. To offer 2-year college students anything less is to partake in bigotry. When we limit the scope of our efforts to simply inculcating job-related skills, we deny our students the broad education for leadership and public life that takes place at the top of our postsecondary system. (p. 17)

Like the students who attend elite, high-ranking colleges and universities, community college students should be urged to seize opportunities to become society's future thought-leaders and problem-solvers. Silencing the *advocate for social justice* subjectivity means that fewer students will receive this encouragement, which is in keeping with power/knowledge relations that want to produce workers—rather than people whose education makes them aware of inequities and inspires them to challenge the status quo.

These subjectivities are silenced by the discourse of power/knowledge relations that need to sustain certain “truths” and reject others; however, Foucault (1978a) said that a discourse cannot help but produce a “reverse discourse” (p. 101). In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault (1978a) wrote that the discourses that described homosexuality as unnatural produced a reverse discourse from which homosexuality began to “speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or ‘naturalness’ be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same

categories by which it was medically disqualified” (p. 101). Likewise, the discourse of vocationalism automatically produces its reverse: a discourse that advocates for a broad education not restricted to job training alone. This new, resistant discourse includes, according to Foucault (1978a), “formulas for contrary objectives” (p. 100) that seek to subvert the goals of the dominant power relations. For instance, such subversion would consist of strategies such as encouraging all students to pursue personal development and civic engagement *in addition to* acquiring job skills. When educators help students think of themselves as *students pursuing a broad education that includes job skills*, these educators position the three historic goals of education as co-equal and oppose the notion that education is job training

Also produced by the new, resistant discourse is a new subjectivity, one that Weedon (1997) called the *agent of challenge* subjectivity (p. 108). A discourse does not make anything happen until its knowledges are embodied and enacted by individuals who step into one or more of that discourse’s preferred (and available) subjectivities because those subjectivities align with what they believe to be true about themselves. Weedon (1997) put it this way:

The political interests and social implications of any discourse will not be realized without the agency of individuals who are subjectively motivated to reproduce or transform social practices and the social power which underpins them. (p. 93)

When power is constituting subjects and controlling their bodies, it makes sense to view resistance as the ways in which the body, as an *agent of challenge*, responds to subjugation. The next section explains this concept in more detail.

### **Foucault’s Concept of Resistance**

The dominant discourse of vocationalism offers us preferred subject positions. When these subject positions do not serve our interests, we resist them (Weedon, 1997). For example,

a student who wants to study music will feel resistance to the notion of selecting a major that supposedly offers more job prospects. Faculty members whose educational philosophy holds that their role is to instill a love of lifelong learning will resist the idea that they should focus on job skills. When this gap between available subjectivities and interests appears, resistance is the result. This is a frequent occurrence. According to Foucault (1978a), “Where there is power, there is resistance ... These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network” (p. 95). The power relations of community college purposes are no exception. Many faculty, in particular, feel compelled to resist the annexation of higher education by the discourses of neoliberalism and vocationalism.

Foucault was interested in power’s effects on bodies (see *The History of Sexuality*, 1978a, p. 147); to understand his concept of resistance, therefore, we must examine two of his images that indicate how resistance, too, affects the body and how it is then enacted by the body. One of these is the image of *inflaming* to describe what happens when resistance arises. Foucault (1978a) wrote that resistances are

the points, knots, or focuses of resistance [that] are spread over time and space at varying densities, at times mobilizing groups of individuals in a definitive way, *inflaming* [emphasis added] certain points of the body, certain moments in life, certain types of behavior.” (p. 96)

His use of the word *inflaming* seems to be suggesting two of its meanings simultaneously: *inflaming* in the sense of being swollen, irritated, and uncomfortable, as an infected cut on a finger becomes inflamed, and *inflaming* in the sense of being filled with passion or enthusiasm for something. Therefore, an individual or group who chooses to resist a particular subjectivity is responding to an irritating and uncomfortable form of subjugation that causes them to be

overcome with a passion to oppose and refuse that subjectivity. Once an individual embodies resistance to vocationalism, for example, that resistance inflames the heart and the soul of the one who protests. Forms that this resistance can take (e.g., in our interactions with students and colleagues) become visible in my analysis of practices in the next section of this chapter.

Another image that Foucault associates with resistance is struggle. In any situation where there are two competing discourses, the “two forces” that are vying to serve conflicting political interests will engage in an “strategy of struggle” (Foucault, 1982, p. 225). These strategies include both “manipulating and inducing actions in a calculated manner,” engaging in “insubordination,” and having “antagonistic reactions” to events (Foucault, 1982, p. 225). They are used *by both forces* in a constant process of attempting to influence actions while warding off the opposition. This “relationship of confrontation” (Foucault, 1982, p. 225) is inevitable, ongoing, fluid, unstable, and reversible. In the struggle between the discourse of vocationalism and the discourse of comprehensive education, for example, both are critical of the other. Both seek to undermine the knowledge the other is advancing as “truth.” My analysis of practices later in this chapter illustrates this perpetual conflict.

This contentious situation may seem to be unhealthy and exhausting. For post-structuralists, however, it is far preferable to its opposite. That opposite is not the overthrow of the old structure and the installation of a new and better one, nor is it an escape from power relations. Both actions are impossible because competing interests are everywhere. Even when resistance is able to vanquish power altogether, it creates a new regime of truth that gives rise to a new set of power relations, including new forms of resistance (Foucault, 1982). “Every strategy of confrontation,” said Foucault (1994b), “dreams of becoming a relationship of power” (p. 143). If the personal development and citizenship development purposes of higher education were to



become dominant in colleges and universities, many people would oppose and resist the downplaying of the career development purpose.

The opposite of struggle is not the freedom from all subjugation either. Subjectivities are created not by individuals but social relations. Refusing one subject position means only that we are required to select another to inhabit.

So what is the opposite of struggle? The answer, according to Foucault (1982), is a state of domination, a situation “in which the subject is unable to overturn or reverse the power relations” (Oksala, 2005, p. 177). These situations tend to occur when power relations, which are typically “fluid and reversible,” are institutionalized, creating “strongholds that are difficult to suppress” (Oksala, 2005, p. 68). As I pointed out in Chapter 2: Subjugation, America’s system of education is currently engaged in a struggle between those who wish to institutionalize neoliberal values and those who oppose that goal as detrimental to American citizens. The latter (the resistance) works to prevent a state of domination. This group’s “strategy of struggle” is the preferred state because it allows for the possibility of “instigating shifts in power relations by acting in different ways to influence each other’s behavior” (Oksala, 2005, p. 178). It keeps alive the possibility of change.

The ability to engage in the struggle and mount a resistance, for Foucault-influenced post-structuralists, is the only form of freedom and agency that we have. Our society constructs our categories, our realities, and our identities. As Oksala (2005) points out, even “our choices themselves are culturally constituted” (p. 2). Agency, or our ability to act, then, is only an ability to respond to, confront, and rebel against these categories, realities, and identities. Freedom, said St. Pierre (2000), is “ongoing resistance to how we are being constituted and are constituting ourselves as subjects” (p. 492). This resistance does indeed effect change. In fact, Foucault said

that “power relations are *obliged* [emphasis added] to change with the resistance” (as cited in St. Pierre, 2000, p. 492). Even strategic conditions that have become entrenched over decades can be altered. For example, the neoliberalism that has become deeply rooted in all U.S. institutions is currently being challenged by economists offering alternative income tax policy proposals to confront and address the ways that rich people are able to dodge paying taxes, achieve massive wealth accumulation, and contribute to extreme income inequality (Wallace-Wells, 2019). In addition, after decades of prioritizing profits for company shareholders above all else, including the well-being of employees, the environment, and communities, some corporate chief executive officers have begun to advocate for “inclusive prosperity,” a philosophy that values “investing in the economic security of... employees and the communities in which [businesses] operate,” rather than focusing on short-term profits in ways that can be harmful to employees and communities (Business Roundtable, 2019).

Agency and freedom, then, consist of the practices of those who resist by taking up the *agent of challenge* subject position. These agents create change in two ways. First of all, they interrogate the “truths” and norms underlying the dominant discourse to reveal how they might function as a vehicle for resistance and beneficial change. According to Foucault (1978a),

Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it, any more than silences are. We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. (pp. 100-101)

My analyses in Chapters 4 and 5 of this dissertation showed that the discourse of vocationalism is an “instrument of power” in that its discursive rules produce and sustain the norms and dividing practices that urge students to inhabit the *future worker* subjectivity and community college faculty to take up the *workforce developer* subjectivity, thus serving the aims of power relations. For example, when the norm is higher-education-as-job-training, then anyone who pursues higher education for other purposes is deviant.

The discourse of vocationalism is an “effect of power” in that, once its realities that are widely accepted as “truth,” this “truth” becomes a fixture in the discourse that is circulated. For example, power relations hold that material wealth is the primary measure of success; as a result, the discourse privileges this belief and encourages that it be used as the basis of individuals’ decision-making.

However, the discourse of vocationalism can also function as a “hindrance” or “stumbling-block.” In advancing certain realities or knowledges, a discourse naturally identifies its *opposing* realities or knowledges. For example, when a discourse promotes low- to medium-skilled job training for students of lower socioeconomic status, that recommendation can be called into question when the *agent of challenge* asks, “Why do we do that? Why shouldn’t those students, like those from higher-income backgrounds, be encouraged to pursue their interests and develop their talents?” Through its very existence, a discourse also exposes its game plan and/or strategies, which lead to the development of counter-strategies by those who resist. Foucault (1982) said that resistance can be used “as a chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations, locate their position, find out their point of application and the methods used” (p. 211). For example, when a liberal arts major is subjected to a dividing practice and assured that her choice of an academic path was foolish, the *agent of challenge* can counteract

that practice by presenting contradictory data to challenge this claim. By showing the student evidence that her decision was sound, the *agent of challenge* affirms that decision. As soon as a discourse organizes, it exposes the ways in which it can be undermined. Then, that information can be used by the resistance to deploy the appropriate “strategy of struggle.”

In addition, power is undermined when *agents of challenge* “question the status of the individual” (Foucault, 1982, p. 211). Foucault (1982) wrote that struggles of resistance,

on the one hand, assert the right to be different and they underline everything which makes individuals truly individual. On the other hand, they attack everything which separates the individual, breaks his links with others, splits up community life, forces the individual back on himself and ties him to his own identity in a constraining way. (pp. 211-212).

This strategy is especially pertinent to the struggle between the discourse of vocationalism and the discourse of comprehensive education in community colleges, for the bone of contention is exactly “the right to be different”; it is about whether community colleges should continue to encourage people to develop into unique individuals and connect to their communities *in addition to* attaining job skills. As I stated in Chapter 2, the neoliberal climate of the last several decades, with its promotion of self-interested and materialistic pursuits and its rejection of community, has provided fertile ground for power relations that privilege job preparation. As a result, the resistance must continuously struggle against its attempts to discourage individualism and to promote competition over collaboration.

Yet another way to “thwart” the dominant discourse is for the *agent of challenge* to embody the knowledges and “truths” of the competing discourse and advance alternative interpretations and possibilities. In restoring subjugated knowledges and resurrecting silenced

subjectivities, these agents create spaces for new ways of thinking and being. In the following sections, I analyze practices that emerge from the discourse of comprehensive education and describe how these strategies function within the struggle.

### **My Selection of Practices for Analysis**

My analysis focuses on several institution-level practices that attempt to fulfill the broader purposes of community college education. These practices include the following: (a) the institutional mission statements of three community colleges, (b) data used in support of claims, (c) curricular and extracurricular practices, (d) a learning activity used in the classroom, and (e) conversations between advisors and students. Although there were many practices to choose from, I focused my analysis on the ones that demonstrate very different approaches to the same practices discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 of this dissertation. For instance, in Chapter 4, I analyzed a mission statement and a marketing message that privilege vocationalism in community colleges; in this chapter, I analyze three mission statements and a marketing message that privilege non-vocational purposes. In Chapter 5, I analyzed advising practices that narrow community college purposes to job training; in this chapter, I analyze advising practices that promote a set of broader purposes. Some practices—such as the assessment of student learning outcomes—are not included in this analysis due to space concerns; however, they, too, can be practices that support comprehensive education. The analyses I *did* include address the last two of my four research questions:

- 1) How do power relations and practices produce knowledges about the purposes of community college education?
- 2) How do these relations produce and constrain subjectivities for community college students and community college faculty and other leaders?

- 3) What are the resistances within these relations of power?
- 4) How might these points of resistance create possibilities for new discourse and practices?

The practices that I analyze include only published texts and conversations about comprehensive education in which I myself was a participant. As I explained in Chapters 4 and 5, I selected these practices, first of all, because they all convey “expert” discourse, which is the discourse of authority figures in society’s respected professions and institutions. Because these individuals are widely viewed as trustworthy sources of information and opinion, the discourse they obey establishes “truths” and produces subjectivities. In the discourse of higher education, I consider experts and authority figures to be not only personnel with leadership titles (e.g., dean, director, vice president, or president) but also advisors and faculty who serve in leadership roles in their classrooms and among their colleagues.

I collected the published material through library and Internet searches at times when I was seeking texts that promote the non-vocational purposes of community college education, for one of the goals of my research project is to identify resistance to privileging vocationalism over other purposes. I took field notes on the spoken language by writing down in my journal what I heard or said in meetings or conversations from February 2019 through September 2019.

All of these practices enact the discourse of comprehensive community college education; thus, they function as “a stumbling-block” to the dominant discourse of vocationalism (Foucault, 1978a, p. 101). Although these practices are those enacted by institutional leaders in various areas within community colleges, they all work together to produce an alternative conception that challenges the dominant understanding being advanced as “truth.”

Foucault (1978a) used the term *swarm* to describe resistances and how they function:

Just as the network of power relations ends by forming a dense web that passes through apparatuses and institutions, without being exactly localized in them, so too the swarm of points of resistance traverses social stratifications and individual unities. (p. 96)

I think of the resistances that I discuss as a kind of “swarm.” They are everywhere, at the local, state, and national levels. They come from varying socioeconomic levels. They arise from individuals serving different roles in different locations. They emerge in different institutions such as organizations and colleges. Because of this swarm, power remains ever vulnerable and can never rest, never stop constructing and defending its “truths.”

### **An Analysis of Resistance in Practices**

In this section, I analyze several institutional-level practices that are “points” of resistance “inflaming” or inciting opposition to the discourse of neoliberalism in community colleges and asserting the broader, historical purposes of higher education. Resistance, like power, is revealed in practices, which Foucault (1991b) defined as the “‘places’ where ‘what is said and what is done’” expose the rules at work (p. 75). Operating at this everyday or “micro” level (Foucault, 1979a, p. 26), resistances expose and challenge social norms, bring disqualified or subjugated knowledges into recognizability, and encourage new or suppressed subject positions that attempt to challenge the limits that power would impose. All of the resistances I discuss do one or more of these things.

My analysis here is again guided by the same adaptations of Cheek’s (2008) questions for Foucauldian discourse analysis that I used in Chapters 4 and 5. First, I ask, “What knowledge, realities, or “truths” are produced and constrained in this particular practice?” Typically, these knowledges have been “subjugated”—“buried or masked” or “disqualified” (Foucault, 2003, p.

7)—and resistance is attempting to reanimate and re-legitimize them. Next, I ask, “What discursive rules make this particular practice possible?” In other words, what are the specific conditions of a specific time and place—society’s current events, values, beliefs, and mores—that provide the conditions for what is said? My third question is, “What rules say that some expressions are true while others are false?” With this question, I explore the social norms and/or dividing practices that have come to guide individuals’ choices and behaviors. Finally, I ask, “How is this practice being used to keep power relations circulating or to disrupt them?” Examining practices that are functioning as resistance involves determining how these practices are challenging pervasive ways of thinking, opening up “spaces for disruption”, and creating the possibility of transformation (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 119).

Using these questions to guide my analysis of practices, I generate some insights in response to my third and fourth research questions: What are the resistances within these relations of power? How might these points of resistance create possibilities for new discourse and practices?

### *Institutional Mission Statements*

In Chapter 2: Subjugation, I established that community college administrators and faculty are institutional leaders who embody knowledges that either uphold or reject the limited subject positions generated in power relations. If they choose to oppose these positions, their practices can resist the subordination inherent in the *future worker* and *workforce developer* subjectivities. According to Weedon (1997),

Resistance to the dominant at the level of the individual subject is the first stage in the production of alternative forms of knowledge, or, where such alternatives already exist,



of winning individuals over to these discourses and gradually increasing their social power. (p. 108)

The individuals responsible for the practices analyzed in the following sections are *agents of challenge* engaging in the form of resistance that Foucault (1978b) called “counter-conduct,” or “struggle against the procedures implemented for conducting others” (p. 201). When the discourse of power relations promotes job training, counter-conduct occurs when individuals promote a broader set of options.

In Chapter 4: The *Future Worker* Subjectivity, I analyzed the mission statement of the North Carolina Community College system, which focuses exclusively on workforce and economic development as its purpose. Interestingly, though, my review of the mission statements of the state’s 58 community colleges indicate that the faculty, staff, and administrators who serve as leaders in these colleges maintain broader mission statements for their institutions. Of course, some of these institutional mission statements may have existed prior to the adoption of the system’s current job-focused mission statement. Also, they may not accurately decisions and actions actually occurring in a college. Still, though, their continued existence may indicate some resistance to state-level goals. I selected three representative examples to illustrate wording that encompasses all three historical purposes of community college education, rather than focusing solely on job training:

The College provides comprehensive educational programs and services to *advance our diverse population and empower lifelong learners to succeed as global citizens.*

(emphasis added, Alamance Community College, 2019)

Catawba Valley Community College is a comprehensive learning community that provides a multitude of *collegiate*, industrial/vocational, and *life-skills/personal enrichment experiences*, *empowering all of its constituents to*

1. *identify and champion higher purposes in their lives and in their communities.*
2. *value teamwork with a global community by respecting the power of diversity and inclusivity, and*
3. *live as a contributing member and leader within society.* (emphasis added, Catawba Valley Community College, 2019)

Carteret Community College offers *opportunities for lifelong learning* through high quality traditional and distance learning teaching, training, support, and enrichment with the intended purpose of *improving the quality of life for all citizens* of Carteret County and eastern North Carolina. (emphasis added, Carteret Community College, 2019)

I have added emphasis to indicate the parts of these mission statements that reveal these institutions' commitment to the broader, historical purposes of higher education (Cohen & Brawer, 1987; Dorn, 2017; Giroux, 2011; Rudolph, 1990; Turpin, 2016). These statements advance the position that the purposes of education are broad rather than solely work-related; in fact, the first and third refrain from ever mentioning words and phrases such as *job*, *career*, *workforce*, *training*, or *economic development*, and the second only briefly mentions providing “industrial/vocational” experiences among other types of experiences.

Community college leaders' crafting of their institutional mission statements is thus in keeping with the knowledge or "truth" that community colleges do much more than offer job training. Instead, they provide a broad array of educational options for many different spheres of life; in fact, these three mission statements recognize the subject positions of *citizens*, *lifelong learners*, *members of society*, and *society leaders*. The second mission statement even expresses the goal of helping students find and pursue "higher purposes" in life. Although these higher purposes are not specified, we can infer that they are things like humanitarianism, creative expression, self-actualization, and the like. It is doubtful that they refer to career and material success. Clearly, the knowledge that underpins these institutional mission statements arises from a reverse discourse that rejects the idea of community-college-education-as-job-training. In promoting the broader, historical array of purposes, these mission statements offer, instead, "subjugated knowledges" (Foucault, 2003, p. 7) that power relations seek to erase.

Several discursive rules make these kinds of mission statements possible. One of them is the belief that higher education has always served multiple purposes and should continue to do so. Another is a belief in the democratic nature of the community college, which was established to provide opportunities for personal and professional development to a wide range of socioeconomic groups, not just the upper classes. Yet another rule is adherence to a definition of the word *college* as an institution of higher learning that provides a general education, not technical training alone. Finally, the tradition of shared governance in higher education, which grants some of the authority and responsibility for decision-making about the institution's practices to the people who engage in those practices, allows faculty and staff to contribute to the composition of institutional mission statements. As a result, these college personnel are able to incorporate their values and their beliefs about broad education into these mission statements.

This practice of writing broad institutional mission statements fixes as a norm—what is “in the true” (Foucault, 1981, p. 60)—the notion of a college as an institution that produces broadly educated, well rounded graduates from all walks of life. This norm is born of “reverse discourse” (Foucault, 1978a, p. 101) that opposes the norm of community-college-as-job-training generated in the discourse of vocationalism. This broader vision therefore competes against dominant discourse to offer other viewpoints, such as alternative subject positions that include *student pursuing a broad education* for students and *holistic educator* for faculty.

This does not mean, of course, that these mission statements are completely liberated from the discourse of vocationalism. The institutional leaders who write these kinds of college mission statements are certainly subject to the power relations of vocationalism, and they undoubtedly act in ways that serve the aims of those power relations; thus, they are complicit with power’s desires even as they engage in forms of protest (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016). Weedon (1997) wrote that “individuals of necessity commit themselves to specific subject positions and embrace quite contradictory modes of subjectivity at different moments” (p. 94). Community college personnel, too, shift in and out of conflicting subject positions. For example, a faculty member may step into the subjectivity of *holistic educator* in the classroom but take up the subjectivity of *workforce developer*, actively promoting the college’s degree programs that focus mainly on job training, outside the classroom. The community college mission includes workforce development, and it is fitting for college personnel to work to fulfill this goal. However, when job training is being promoted as the sole purpose of higher education, college personnel can shift again to *holistic educator* to resist attempts to narrow students’ options.

Nevertheless, even temporary shifts into alternative subject positions create resistance that disrupts power relations. Every time someone raises a question or points out an alternative viewpoint, there is potential to expand thinking and open up discourse to new possibilities. Because of the obvious disparity between the stated goals of state-level and institutional mission statements, the practice of writing broad institutional mission statements can be viewed as a form of “counter-conduct” (Foucault, 1978b, p. 201) that *agents of challenge* employ in the struggle against power’s efforts to privilege the discourse of vocationalism.

### *Marketing and Recruiting Practices*

In Chapter 4: The *Future Worker* Subjectivity, my analysis of the image and text of one community college’s website revealed its exclusive focus on workforce development. Despite the broader nature of most community colleges’ mission statements, many still tend to highlight job training in their marketing and recruiting practices. Others, however, indicate broader purposes.

I myself used this type of language when I took up the *agent of challenge* subject position and wrote the text for brochures that inform prospective students about my college’s four transfer degree programs. I used words and phrases that explicitly refer to and promote the broader purposes of a community college education. A portion of the text in an Associate in Arts program brochure, for example, is as follows:

Do you plan to become a *thought leader and problem solver in your* chosen profession *and your community*? Your path to a bachelor’s degree begins with [the] Associate in Arts program. You will be guided by caring faculty who are subject matter experts and experienced educators as you complete your general education requirements, *explore*

*your interests*, and *develop your intellect* in preparation for transferring to a four-year college or university.

I have added emphasis to indicate how these sentences refer to the traditional, broader purposes of higher education. Suggesting that the pursuit of an Associate in Arts degree contributes to one's development as a "thought leader and problem solver" in the *community* as well as a profession promotes the public good purpose of higher education by reminding readers of their responsibilities as citizens. Asserting that the program allows you to "explore your interests" and "develop your intellect" indicates the personal development purpose of higher education.

This marketing practice produces and sustains the subjugated knowledge that the purposes of community colleges are broad and not focused only on job training or career development alone. A brochure with this wording transmits to prospective students the message that community colleges are places where students can develop holistically for their many roles in life, both in the workplace and elsewhere. Thus, this practice affirms the value of these roles and overall alternate ways of being.

Several discursive rules make this practice possible. One rule cleaves to the historical purposes of higher education and the conception of a college as a place where students engage in self-development and prepare themselves for not only careers but also service to their communities and their nation. A second rule is the belief that the population groups served by community colleges should be expected (just as other population groups are) to attend college in pursuit of these multiple goals. Another rule is the understanding that American citizens decide to go to college not for economic success alone. Some people, for instance, are motivated by their desire to develop their talents or contribute to society, and these goals are acceptable as any other. Finally, college personnel such as myself have enough autonomy to shift into the *agent of*

*challenge* subjectivity, at least temporarily, as we generate text adhering to all of these rules that gather together to form the discourse of comprehensive education.

The text of this marketing practice, like the texts of the institutional mission statements analyzed in the previous section, promote the social norm of the community college as a place to develop oneself broadly. This norm opposes the norm that job training is the sole purpose of a community college education, which is generated in the discourse of vocationalism.

Thus, this practice functions as a point of resistance to power relations' vocationalist message. In opening up a wider range of subject positions for students and faculty, it disrupts power's attempt to narrow those subject positions to *future worker* and *workforce developer*. By recognizing subjectivities that are irrelevant or counterproductive to power's interests, this practice inhibits power relations' efforts to keep community colleges focused on training the low- to medium-skilled workers needed for capitalist enterprises.

### *Data*

In Chapter 5: The *Workforce Developer* Subjectivity, I wrote that I have witnessed instances in which community college personnel have used weak, contradictory, incomplete, or cherry-picked data to support a "truth" they wished to assert. Countering this practice by offering reputable data is another way that institutional leaders resist attempts to limit the purposes of higher education to vocationalism. When leaders are prepared to share more complete, more accurate information, they can correct misinformation when it is presented and expose as flawed the knowledges that rely on this misinformation. For example, community college personnel often assert that their institutions function as ladders to the middle class, yet this "knowledge" is not totally accurate. The bottom of the household income range for middle class households of up to three people is about \$48,000, according to a 2018 report by the Pew

Research Center (Bernard & Russell, 2019). Many of the entry-level jobs available to community college graduates do not pay this much, so unmarried graduates or graduates with unemployed spouses may not advance to a higher socioeconomic level until promotions, pay raises, more education, or the addition of a second earner raises their household incomes. This kind of information does not have to be used to disavow the idea of the community college as a ladder to the middle class; instead, it could be used to encourage community college students to commit themselves to growing and developing in ways that continue to ensure upward mobility.

Institutional leaders also embody resistance when they provide ignored or suppressed information that directly contradicts the “truths” offered by power/knowledge relations. For example, they can point to surveys of employers who affirm general education’s role in producing more well-rounded employees whose job performance is enhanced through their personal development and their civic development in college (Berrett, 2013; Gordon-Reed, 2013). Leaders can also share statistics about humanities graduates that reveal these people to be sought after and prospering, thus weakening the argument that majoring in something like history or anthropology is a foolish choice (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2014).

These types of information can also be used for reinforcement when employers themselves voice support for more general education. This occurred at one meeting I attended when a representative from a local textile plant said that her company values employees who are broadly educated. In situations like that, institutional leaders can point out that attention to personal development and the public good improves not only work performance but also other equally important roles in life.



The “truth” produced in these practices is the importance of accuracy in information that is offered in support of claims. The discursive rule that makes these practices possible is higher education culture’s long-standing tradition of insisting on high quality facts and data. According to this rule, the members of Academia should expose flawed data, and they are free to unearth data that supports “subjugated knowledges,” such as the value of a broad community college education. Faculty, in particular, engage in these practices as part of their work as teachers and scholars. Consequently, they uphold a norm of accuracy, even when doing so challenges the status quo. When that situation occurs, their desire to confront faulty discourse that is based on incorrect or incomplete information may lead to their choice of the *agent of challenge* subjectivity.

As an illustration, consider one dominant narrative that describes the entire community college system as ineffective or “failing,” which has persisted for over five decades due to consistently low completion rates at community colleges. In response, Sullivan (2017) and many community college leaders across the nation have argued that this narrative is based on certain kinds of data, especially graduation rates, that provide an incomplete portrait of how community college education positively impacts students’ lives. Some of these leaders even assume the *agent of challenge* subject position to oppose this “failure” narrative; Sullivan (2017), for instance, is a community college Professor of English who established The Community College Success Stories Project, a collection of essays written by community college students to describe their educational experiences and the positive personal effects of those experiences. These stories reveal how attending college helps people mature, gain new confidence, make a better life, believe in themselves, lift themselves and their families out of poverty, and so on.

The practice of deploying contradictory data is a type of “counter-conduct” (Foucault, 1978b, p. 201) that *agents of challenge* use to disrupt and subvert power relations by contesting both the set of “truths” and the limited choice of subjectivities preferred by those power relations. In so doing, they open up a broader array of available subjectivities to include those that power relations has sought to silence. For faculty, this includes the *advocate for social justice* subjectivity, for certain data calls into question power relations’ conflation of vocationalism and significant socioeconomic advancement for lower-income students. For students, exposure to data that affirms their true interests and goals can embolden their choice of a silenced subjectivity, such as *student seeking a broad education* or *engaged community member*.

This strategy can be an effective tool for advancing a competing discourse; however, even when the *agent of challenge* subjectivity is inhabited temporarily and balanced with shifts back into power relations’ preferred subjectivities, the practice can be risky and dangerous for those who resist. They may be viewed as difficult, combative, disruptive, uncooperative, and so on. Particularly when the resistance is a component of power relations that have been, as Foucault (1982) put it, “governmentalized...in state institutions” (p. 224) and are nearing a state of domination, there could be negative consequences, such as ostracization or job loss. Preventing that domination from occurring and maintaining a struggle that Foucault (1982) called “permanent provocation” (p. 222) requires strategic decisions about when, where, and how to exercise one’s freedom and agency.

#### *Support for Curricular and Extracurricular Promotion of Broader Purposes*

Institutional leaders become embodied points of resistance in the power relations of higher education purposes when they promote not just job training but also personal

development and the public good. This support includes championing the vital role of general education courses, particularly the liberal arts, in contributing to students' holistic development. President Emeritus Sean Fanelli of New York's Nassau Community College, for example, advocated for interdisciplinary liberal arts courses, liberal arts learning communities, an increase in liberal arts offerings, and the hiring faculty who were willing to embed liberal arts topics in their occupational training courses (Fanelli, 2013, pp. 32, 37). He did so, he said, because

the purpose of a college education is to enlighten the person, educate the citizen, and prepare the student for a career. The liberal arts in community colleges are the key to all of these purposes and for that reason must be promoted and defended. (Fanelli, 2013, p. 38)

Other community college leaders have shown support for the public good purpose of higher education by joining both the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) and its national consortium of community colleges dubbed "The Democracy Commitment." According to AAC&U, "The mission of the partnership is for every graduate of an American community college to have had an education in democracy, whether they aim to transfer to university, achieve an associate degree, or obtain a certificate" (*Bridging Cultures*). One community college, Kingsborough Community College in Brooklyn, New York, promoted the public good purpose of higher education through implementation of a civic engagement graduation requirement. Students are required to participate in at least one "civic engagement experience," a "responsibility [that] may be accomplished through political activity, community service, engagement in leadership roles, advocacy or becoming informed about issues that relate to social change" (Kingsborough Community College, 2019). Students are required to write a reflective essay, which is assessed using a rubric.

Another way that many community colleges have shown attention to the public good purpose is to support their efforts to infuse service learning into their courses. Typically, this learning method takes the form of community-based activities in which students attain a course outcome while also serving some need in society. For example, accounting students might assist low-income citizens with tax preparation, and sociology students might work with a community agency to provide supplies to the homeless population.

Institutional leaders can also provide support for extracurricular activities such as artistic performances, presentations on social or political issues, art shows, public lectures and debates, multicultural celebrations, and so on. These activities provide students with exposure to ideas and opinions that help students broaden their perspective and better understand their community and the world.

These actions on the part of community college leaders re-animate and re-legitimize the subjugated “truths” that community colleges should and do offer broad education and that this broad education is essential to the complete development of all students. These practices contest the idea that a college can be a place where it is acceptable for some students to acquire only job-related skills and exit without being encouraged to pursue personal and civic development. According to Gordon’s afterword in Foucault’s *Power and Knowledge* (1980), Foucault taught us that we can “call in question the very rationality which grounds the establishment of a regime of acceptability and the programmatic logic whereby the ‘unacceptable’ is regularly restored to the ‘acceptability’ of a norm” (pp. 257-258). In this case, the rationality is an altered definition of the term *college*, which has historically meant something different than the terms *technical institute* and *vocational-technical school*. When we interrogate this new norm, we can question how and why the “unacceptable” became “acceptable.” Those who engage in these practices

function as *agents of challenge* who resist power relations' efforts to narrow education to vocationalism.

### *Classroom Practices*

Earlier in this chapter, I discussed Foucault's (1978a) notion of resistance as "inflaming" the body (p. 96) and wrote that resistance inflames the heart and soul of the one who protests. Nowhere, perhaps, is this more evident than in the educators who espouse the broader purposes of education and believe that their role is to do much more than prepare students to function in a particular work environment. In the learning activities they design and in their informal discussions outside the classroom, they also encourage students to develop their minds. They cultivate students' ability to think critically and question. They build students' awareness of their civic responsibilities. They strive to expand students' appreciation for diversity. They promote counterculture messages about the non-material sources of happiness and human fulfillment. They engage in consciousness-raising so that students will understand the status quo and develop the skills they need to critique and challenge it, just as W.E.B. Du Bois believed in 1902 that the progress of African Americans would be hindered until they received an education that equipped them with the ability to "agitate the existing social order" (Grant, Brown & Brown, 2016, p. 11). All community college instructors in all disciplines (both transfer degree faculty and faculty who teach in career and technical education programs) can engage in these activities and urge learners to take advantage of all opportunities – in their academic and extracurricular pursuits – that prepare them to live satisfying and meaningful lives.

Among the "plurality of resistances," the type of resistance these faculty demonstrate might be categorized by Foucault (1978a) as the "solitary" type (p. 96). Points of resistance are distributed throughout the entire power network, and they may be spread out in space and time in

such a way that educators may feel isolated or alone in their efforts to foster students' holistic development. Nevertheless, their actions serve as critical "knots" of resistance (Foucault, 1978a, p. 96) in the power/knowledge relations of vocationalism.

As an educator, one way that I promote the broader purposes of higher education is a discussion I lead when I teach *College Transfer Success*, a required course for transfer degree students that is designed to help them successfully navigate the higher education environment to achieve their academic goals. Students who enroll in this course are typically in their first or second semester of their program of study. I begin this discussion by acknowledging why students are probably sitting in our classroom at that moment: they have been told all of their lives that earning a college degree is a prerequisite for a high paying job. Then, I show them the mathematical calculations that reveal a 40-hour workweek to be 24% of the total hours in a week. Of the remaining 76% of the week, I subtract the 33% that should be devoted to sleep (8 hours per night), which leaves 43% of the week that a person is awake but not at work.

I ask the class this question: "Who are you that 43% of your week, when you're not a worker and you're not asleep?" Next, I engage them in a conversation about all of life's other roles, including everything from spouse or partner to parent to artist or hobbyist to volunteer to citizen in a democracy. I point out to them that their college experience is also for developing that other 43% of their lives. Finally, we discuss all of the ways that college will offer them opportunities to grow holistically.

Then, when my students complete a writing assignment about their goals for their college education, I require them to answer these two questions: (a) Besides college degrees, what are some other things that you want to get out of your college experience (consider ways you'd like to grow personally, talents and skills you'd like to develop, subjects you'd like to learn more

about, etc.); and (b) What positive contributions would you like to make to your family, to your community, and to the nation? In these ways, I am not only serving as a point of resistance but also asking students themselves to resist the idea that their college education is solely about preparing for employment.

In addition, I try to present every topic covered in the class in terms of its broader implications, not just its relationship to an academic-to-career path. For instance, when my students and I discuss techniques for time management in college, I ask them to consider how they can apply those strategies to produce a happier, more meaningful life overall.

Inhabiting the *agent of challenge* subjectivity, I work to revive the “subjugated knowledge” that one’s college experience can be a period of holistic transformation of one’s self and development of clarity about one’s life goals. I use these practices to challenge the pervasive way of thinking, which has reduced college to a transactional space in which one just does the minimum necessary to earn a degree that unlocks the gate to university admission and then a good job.

The main discursive rules that make these practices possible include the centuries-old tradition of multiple purposes in higher education, a long-standing culture of higher education that protects educators’ right to academic freedom, and the prevalent view of educators as experts and authority figures who can be trusted to provide “truth” and helpful guidance.

This discourse of comprehensive education creates the norm of the broadly educated college student, and my teaching practices perpetuate that norm. The norm in the competing discourse of vocationalism urges students to think of themselves as future workers; as a result, it produces the *agent of challenge* subjectivity for “inflamed” educators like me, who are compelled to counter that norm. I do so by adhering to the rules of the discourse of

comprehensive education instead, which I am allowed because of higher education's tradition of academic freedom. I view myself as a broadly educated professional who can say things that may not only shift my students' understanding of what college is for but also "inflamm" their own resistance to any efforts to restrict their thinking. As I myself inhabit and make visible again the silenced subjectivity of *holistic educator*, and I also revive additional silenced subjectivities, especially the *student seeking a broad education* subjectivity, for my students.

Thus, this practice disrupts the power relations of vocationalism. Without using theoretical jargon, I identify for my students the two competing discourses vying for their subjectivity and encourage them to consider all of the possibilities rather than limiting themselves to one. In so doing, it is not my intention to criticize an institution or a system. As Foucault (1982) wrote, "The main objective of these struggles is to attack not...an institution of power, or group, or elite, or class" (p. 212). Rather, I oppose "a form of power," one that, said Foucault (1982),

categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects. (p. 212)

The discourse of vocationalism creates and attaches to the bodies of faculty the identity of *workforce developer* whose purpose is to develop in students the job skills or soft skills they need to be successful employees for capitalist enterprises. In turn, these faculty help to create and attach to the bodies of students the identity of *worker*. My own struggle takes the form of a constant objection to power/knowledge relations' attempts to limit my students' conceptions of who they are and what they can become.



## *Advising Practices*

In Chapter 5: The *Workforce Developer* Subjectivity, I described practices that communicate a vocationalist message to students during advising sessions. I pointed out that beginning such a session with the question “What is your career goal?” reduces the student to a *future worker* and limits the role of the community college to workforce development. Advising for the broader purposes of community college education requires starting an advising session more broadly. It could involve, for example, beginning with a question like “Could you tell me about what you hope to take away from your experience here at XYZ Community College?” Students are likely to respond with answers such as “an Associate in Arts degree” or “a diploma in dental assisting” or “a year of credit that will transfer to a university.” If so, we would ask a few more questions to get the student thinking, right then and there, before even taking his or her first college course, that there is much more to the college experience than that: “What else do you hope to achieve? Are there specific skills you’d like to develop? What would you like to learn more about? What talents would you like to strengthen? What kinds of people would you like to meet and befriend? What do you hope you’ll learn about yourself?” and so on. The student may not be able to articulate the answers to these questions, but we have laid a foundation for later consideration. If the student *does* share a particular interest, such as British literature or travel abroad or volunteer work, we can affirm the value of that interest and explain how the college can nurture it.

Another way to resist power relations’ vocationalist message is to support and encourage the increasingly rare student who selects a major (such as English or psychology) that lacks a direct, linear path to a specific job. As I pointed out in Chapter 4: The *Future Worker* Subjectivity, these students are likely to endure criticism and normalizing judgment from many

other people whom they encounter. From me, however, they will receive only encouragement to follow their passion.

These practices revive the subjugated knowledge that college is a time of holistic personal development and exploration. They also constrain the knowledge that the purpose of college education is job training.

The discursive rules that make these practices possible are the same as those producing all of the other practices in this chapter, including the long history of multiple purposes in higher education, and the belief that the population groups served by community colleges should be expected (just as other population groups are) to pursue all of these goals. An additional rule is the belief that college advisors are experts and authority figures who can be trusted as a source of “truth.”

These practices sustain the norm of a broad education for every college student, regardless of the student’s major or program of study. It opposes the norm of college-as-job-training produced in the competing discourse of vocationalism.

The practice of promoting a comprehensive education during advising sessions disrupts power relations. In engaging in these kinds of practices, I am again stepping into the *agent of challenge* subjectivity and re-legitimizing a “truth” that power relations have disqualified: the idea that the purposes of community college education are broad and not restricted to job training alone. I am challenging the pervasive ways of thinking that have led my advisees to approach their education as mere job training; thus, I am creating the possibility that they will transform their own goals for their education. I am inhabiting the subjectivities that power relations have sought to silence for me, and I am also encouraging students to choose the *student pursuing a broad education* subjectivity for themselves.

In Chapter 5 of this dissertation, I mentioned that, as an English instructor, I saw myself in the role of workforce developer. It was not until I immersed myself in Foucauldian-influenced poststructural theory that I realized I could withdraw from myself, recognize this subjectivity, and begin to question it and challenge it. Chapter 7: Multiplying Subjectivities will discuss this process in more detail.

## **Conclusion**

The power relations of the purposes of community college education use the discourse of vocationalism to produce two preferred subjectivities—the *future worker* subjectivity and the *workforce developer* subjectivity—and to silence other subjectivities, such as *student seeking a broad education* and *holistic educator*, which are unnecessary or oppositional to power's goals. Resistance arises when people perceive that available subjectivities do not serve their interests and take up the *agent of challenge* subjectivity in an attempt to open up a broader array of options.

In this chapter, I deconstructed practices to show how people who are functioning as points of resistance in power relations adhere to the discourse of comprehensive education to open up subjectivities ignored or repressed by the discourse of vocationalism. These *agents of challenge*, inflamed by what they perceive to be injustice, work to undermine and disrupt attempts to narrow the purposes of community college education. They use a variety of different practices, from the language of mission statements and marketing materials to curricular design to interactions with advisees, to resurrect subjugated knowledges that power has sought to dismiss as unacceptable.

These acts of resistance change the discourse at the institutional level. Some *agents of challenge*, though, are interested in even larger-scale change. In my concluding chapter, I

discuss how educational leaders can do even more to restore community colleges to the democratic engines that were meant to be.

## Chapter 7: Multiplying Subjectivities

*There are times in one's life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all. (Foucault, 1985, p. 8)*

My goal for this research project was to deconstruct the preferred discourse of vocationalism, within relations of power, to show how it produces and constrains certain subject positions for community college students and educators. In addition, I sought to explore how alternative, competing discourses (especially the discourse of comprehensive education) produce subject positions from which subjugation can be resisted and broader purposes of a community college education re-asserted.

I wanted to “think differently,” as Foucault said in this chapter’s opening quote. I wanted to consider my topic from a novel vantage point to see if I could generate unique insights. Therefore, I used a Foucault-influenced poststructural framework, a thinking with Foucault methodology, and Foucauldian discourse analysis to describe how power relations privilege vocationalism over the broader, historical purposes of community college education with the aim of producing the low- to medium-skilled workers needed for local capitalist enterprises. A thinking with poststructural theory methodology provided me with the concepts and tools necessary to interrogate the current emphasis on job training in community colleges, which has come to be the accepted status quo. Foucauldian discourse analysis gave me a process for uncovering discursive rules, social norms, and dividing practices that influence individuals’ decision-making.

My analysis focused on a variety of practices at the local, state, and national levels that sustain or disrupt the power relations of vocationalism. Beginning with the knowledges or “truths” that those practices revealed, I showed how discursive rules make those practices possible. Then, I examined the norms and/or dividing practices that guide and influence community college students’ choices about who and what they can become by producing power relations’ preferred *community college student as future worker* and *workforce developer* subjectivities – or the *agent of challenge* subjectivity, which embodies resistance to open up other possibilities.

In Chapter 2: Subjugation, I reviewed the literature related to the rise of vocationalism within community colleges and to three structural conditions – neoliberal ideology, the characteristics of community college students, and the nature of the community college as an institution with institutional leaders – that work together to provide the climate in which power relations emerge and vocationalism is either promoted or opposed. In that chapter, I established that the knowledges underpinning structural conditions must be embodied by actors who enact the subjugation promoted in those knowledges. In Chapter 3: The Subjectivities of Inquiry, I explored the subjectivities associated with research and interrogation using a Foucault-influenced poststructuralist framework and a thinking with theory methodology. In Chapter 4: The *Future Worker* Subjectivity and Chapter 5: The *Workforce Developer* Subjectivity, I applied Foucauldian discourse analysis to several practices to expose how power/knowledge relations utilize the discourse of vocationalism to limit available subject positions for community college students and faculty. In Chapter 6: The *Agent of Challenge* Subjectivity, I examined additional practices, again using Foucauldian discourse analysis, to show how points of resistance within

power relations, arising from the competing discourse of comprehensive education, open up the range of available subject positions beyond *future worker*.

In the remainder of this chapter, I explore connections to the literature as a reminder of how confining subject positions are “made.” Then, I address theoretical and methodological significance to explain how these subject positions can be “unmade.” Next, in a section about implications, I discuss the results of this “unmaking” process, which include exercising the practices of freedom to multiply subjectivities, opening up new ways of becoming for community college students and faculty. I end with recommendations for future inquiry along with some concluding thoughts.

### **Connections and Contributions to the Literature**

The literature that I reviewed in Chapter 2 focused on three strategic conditions that provide an environment conducive to subjugation of different groups, including subordinate groups and also, ironically, those responsible for the subjugation. The first condition is an economic theory – neoliberal ideology – that has become pervasive in all of society’s institutions, including U.S. educational institutions. Neoliberal principles equate success to material prosperity and consumerism, and they favor the capitalists who own American businesses and industries; this capitalist elite tends to view education as a form of job preparation for workers and as a money-making opportunity for companies that are in the business of selling educational or assessment materials. Consequently, promotion of vocationalism, the educational philosophy that privileges job training, has been on the rise.

The second condition is the open-door admissions policy at community colleges, which results in a student body that tends to be disproportionately low-income, the first in their families to go to college, and members of underrepresented racial or ethnic groups. Some community

college mission statements suggest that these students are best suited for vocational tracks. Once enrolled in those programs, they may not receive adequate encouragement to pursue baccalaureate-level education or to see themselves in other subject positions besides *future worker*.

The third condition is the nature of the community college as an institution with institutional leaders. As I established in Chapter 2, an institution differs from other organizations in that it grows out of and protects a set of core values as opposed to merely getting a job done. Similarly, its leaders differ from those in other sectors in that a substantial part of their role involves instilling those core values in the staff that carries out the institution's daily operations. As social influencers, these leaders can therefore create support or opposition for a vocationalist approach to higher education.

These three conditions provide the necessary conditions for the power relations and an ongoing struggle for subjectivity in the clash between the discourse of vocationalism and the discourse of comprehensive education. The key issue that emerged in my review of the literature is the potential for community college leaders to subjugate themselves to neoliberal ideology and to a reduced set of expectations for lower socioeconomic students to the extent that these students come to be viewed primarily as commodities for the labor market. My review of the literature also discussed the social justice implications by explaining how this "truth" can result in exploitation, oppression, racism, and sexism that damage the very people community colleges were created to serve.

My study contributes to the literature by interrogating this status quo and offering a counter-discourse in response to these injustices. Following Foucault, I employ poststructural concepts to offer one possible description of the "unexamined ways of thinking" (Foucault,



1994a, p. 172) that allow the discourse of vocationalism to produce and constrain the subjectivities available to community college students and faculty in ways that limit them in harmful ways. In addition, I explore the points of resistance that open up more beneficial ways of being. In choosing a post qualitative methodology, my purpose was not to figure out “what needs to be done” but to encourage community college leaders to heed Foucault’s call to “think differently.” Perhaps this dissertation; subsequent publications in journals that are popular among community college personnel, such as *Community College Enterprise*, *New Directions for Community Colleges*, and *Community College Review*; and conference presentations will create new dialogue about the unintended consequences of elevating job training above other historic purposes of higher education. These conversations can then inspire community college leaders to question if and how their institutions promote the broader purposes of higher education to all students in all programs. Ultimately, I hope to provoke educators to think expansively about themselves and their work so that this work will bring them more meaning and satisfaction. When they do, they are more likely to encourage students to think expansively about their future selves and to take advantage of all opportunities for holistic development throughout their academic experiences and beyond.

### **Significance of Poststructural Theory**

Strategic conditions provide the environment in which certain subject positions are “made.” If we want to “unmake” them and expand our possibilities, according to Foucault (1983), we must find out *how* it was that they were made. This discovery requires the interrogation of research. In writing this dissertation, I have investigated the power relations related to the purposes of community college education; in so doing, I have described what these power relations create and constrain so that these products can be evaluated and, if found to be

detrimental, changed. I sought to “resist regimes of truth not by constant and detached creation of new ones, but by deliberately and internally countering what power achieves blindly when it establishes new regimes of truth” (Prado, 1995, p. 114).

To achieve this goal, I selected Foucault-influenced poststructuralism as the theoretical framework for my study. As I read St. Pierre (2000) late in my graduate program, I began to understand Foucault’s conception of how power functions in human relations, and I realized that this conception would provide a useful framework for generating new insights about the disproportionate emphasis on vocationalism in community colleges. The aim of a poststructural analysis (or “critique,” as Foucault called it), is not to identify what is bad or wrong about something but to determine “what type of assumptions, of familiar notions, of established, unexamined ways of thinking the accepted practices are based” (Foucault, 1994a, p. 172). Thus, its main purpose is descriptive; however, this type of interrogation is also a way of “making politics visible” and exposing any harmful practices, both intentional and unintentional (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 13). I recognized that Foucault’s concepts of power/knowledge, discourse, subjectivity, and resistance would be useful tools for disturbing taken-for-granted ways of thinking and acting in relation to the purposes of community college education. In the next sections, I explain how these concepts were significant to my analysis and how my study contributes to an understanding of these concepts.

### *Power/Knowledge*

My study departed from conventional views of power and re-conceived the struggle over the purposes of community college education in terms of Foucault’s ideas about power/knowledge. Fundamental to my analysis was an understanding of power and knowledge as inseparable. The power determining the purposes of community college education comes

from its adherence to knowledges that society widely accepts as “truth” – and vice versa: what has been established as “truth” about the purposes of community colleges engenders nonegalitarian relations of power among those who do and do not act according to that “truth.” With my analysis of practices, I revealed that power, or the ability to affect the actions of others in human relations, employs the knowledge that a vocationalist purpose is fitting for community college students. Because this knowledge is considered by many to be “in the true,” those who embody and enact it are able to restrict the number of acceptable options available to those students. Their actions then reinforce the knowledge or “truth” that the most important purpose of community college education is job training, thereby sustaining power relations. These actors also subjugate conflicting knowledges, including the two additional important purposes of community college education – personal development and citizenship development – and deem them to be unworthy unless they are related somehow to workforce development. When “truths” are embodied and subjugated knowledges rejected, people enact the “truths” in their decisions and activities; at community colleges, actions are in keeping with the goals of power/knowledge, and subjugated knowledges are dismissed, demeaned, or ignored.

My analysis demonstrated a new, innovative method for describing what is being produced—often without conscious awareness—in community college education. Poststructural inquiry is a means for generating important new insights that will not arise within other research paradigms. Just as my study pointed out the potential harm that can come from collegiate-level job training that is not balanced with a commitment to students’ personal growth and citizenship development, additional Foucauldian critiques are needed to deconstruct other power/knowledge relations in higher education. Hopefully, my own research will pave the way for more poststructural analyses of community college practices.

## *Discourse*

According to Foucault's conception, discourse is not what people say. Instead, it is the collection of rules that govern what we are allowed to say. By examining these rules, my study demonstrated how certain discourses either sustain or disrupt power relations. I have referred throughout this dissertation to the "discourse of vocationalism," which supports and perpetuates an emphasis on the vocationalist purpose of community college education, and the "discourse of comprehensive education," which promotes a broader set of purposes for community colleges. These discourses coexist and compete with one another for subjects who will embody and enact their specific set of "truths."

By performing a Foucauldian discourse analysis on "what is said" (Foucault, 1991a, p. 59) in various practices at the national, state, and local levels, I uncovered the discursive rules at work in each discourse and examined how normalizing judgment and dividing practices encourage people to conduct themselves in ways that either conform to power's aims or resist them. Normalizing judgment generates binary oppositions in which the second half of the binary is labeled as deviant from the norm. In the discourse of vocationalism, for example, binaries include all of the following: (1) practical programs of study/impractical programs of study, (2) faculty who teach beneficial job skills/faculty who teach subjects (e.g., the humanities) that are not useful in the workplace, and (3) people training for better jobs and higher income/people who do not seek training (and are therefore outside the norm). Other binaries that were produced in my analysis were professional educators and scholars (university faculty)/job trainers (community college faculty) and, for community college educators, general education faculty/career and technical education faculty. Another was faculty who comply with the

workforce developer subjectivity/faculty who resist by teaching their courses with broader purposes in mind.

To my knowledge, community college practices have not been studied within a poststructural theoretical framework, so my inquiry contributes to the development of Foucauldian discourse analysis in education.

### *Subjectivities*

Like Foucault (1982), who said that his focus was the subject rather than power, my main interest in this study was to reveal the socially created subjectivities that are produced in power relations to serve specific interests. My analysis of practices shows that the preferred subjectivities of the discourse of vocationalism are *future worker* for community college students and *workforce developer* for community college faculty. These subject positions comply with and advance power's goals. However, power relations also produce the *agent of challenge* subjectivity, which seeks to open up a wider range of subjectivities for these groups. My work breaks new ground in community college educational research by demonstrating how this analytic concept can be used to produce new understanding of how these subject positions affect the lives of the people who inhabit them.

### *Resistance*

Finally, Foucault's concept of resistance gave me the means to describe how the opposition to the aims of power/knowledge functions. This approach is a departure from traditional views of power as something that must be overthrown or seized in order to enact beneficial change. In my study, the concept of resistance provides a new way to view detrimental regimes of power/knowledge in higher education as well as a new description of opposition's methods. Arising from the competing, "reverse discourse" of comprehensive

education, points of resistance engage in “counter conduct” to undermine relations of power. These actions can take the form of exposing how power is functioning or re-legitimizing subjectivities, such as *student seeking a broad education* and *holistic educator*, that have been silenced by power.

### **Significance of Thinking with Foucault Methodology**

In addition to selecting Foucault-influenced poststructuralism as my theoretical framework, I used a post qualitative, thinking with theory (thinking with Foucault) methodology to “unmake” the subject positions produced in power relations (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, 2017). By “plugging” the components of Foucault’s poststructural concepts into my consideration of community college purposes, I generated the following research questions to guide my inquiry:

- 1) How do power relations and practices produce knowledges about the purposes of community college education?
- 2) How do these relations produce and constrain subjectivities for community college students and community college faculty and other leaders?
- 3) What are the resistances within these relations of power?
- 4) How might these points of resistance create possibilities for new discourse and practices?

The research process I followed was my own creation. Thinking with theory has no prescribed method (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, 2017). There are unlimited ways of employing it; therefore, I had to develop my own process as I went along. I offer a description of that process here to share one approach that was useful to my analysis and critique.

I began by reading Foucault’s work on power/knowledge produced from the late 1970s to the early 1980s as well as secondary sources on poststructural theory. As I read, I thought about

my own topic: the purposes of community college education. Foucault called his books “little tool boxes” from which people could draw “this sentence or that idea” to interrogate power (Patton, 1979, p. 115). So, when I encountered thoughts or quotations that were relevant to how these purposes are determined in power relations, I stopped to type that excerpt into a document. Then, I wrote about how the theory helped me understand my topic and how my topic illustrated the theory. With each fragment of theory that I added, I built my conception of the power relations of community college purposes. This back-and-forth between theory and topic occurred throughout all phases of my writing process, from idea generation through the drafting phase and into the revision phase. Even as I responded to the feedback from my dissertation committee members, I returned over and over to primary and secondary textual resources to check my understanding, to increase it, or to make new connections. Each time I returned to theory, new and different insights would occur.

As I read theory, I also kept a journal, jotting down notes about my interactions and conversations with colleagues and students during my workday. Later, I recorded my thoughts about how these interactions reflected the power relations related to community college purposes. At the same time, I began identifying specific practices that I could analyze. I explored the transcripts of speeches, government reports, college mission statements, college marketing materials, college websites, journal articles, and news reports. I searched a variety of documents and images and wrote about what they conveyed about the purposes of community college education.

When it was time to draft my first analysis chapter, I found it necessary to develop my own approach to Foucauldian discourse analysis, which has no prescribed method. I read articles about the goals of this approach. One of these articles (Cheek, 2008) included some sample

research questions for the researcher to pose. I adapted these questions to create four that seemed to fit my topic and my aims. I adjusted them slightly throughout the drafting and revising stages of my writing process. I used these questions to interrogate the assumptions underlying the discourse of vocationalism and the discourse of comprehensive education to understand how these discourses function within power relations. As I composed, I considered the data that was arising in my analysis in terms of Foucault's poststructural concepts, blending my thoughts about theory with my analysis of practices (i.e., theory + thought + practices).

### **Research Limitations and Recommendations for Future Inquiry**

The concept of "limitations" in a research study arises from the discourse of the dominant, positivist paradigm, which is still privileged in academic research over postmodern paradigms. This discourse creates a *researcher* subjectivity that is bound to certain conventions that the power/knowledge relations of academic research seek to preserve. Yet, the concept of "limitations"—the study's flaws or shortcomings that affected the findings or interpretation of those findings—does not fit a post qualitative method within a poststructural framework. Limitations are typically concerned with issues such as the size or characteristics of a research sample, or a lack of data, or bias, or lack of access to documents and people, and so on. These issues simply do not apply to a thinking with theory methodology that does not seek to discover meaning or to answer questions. Instead, it seeks to put theoretical concepts to work "to show how they work, what they do, what they allow, and what they unsettle" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017, p. 733) in order to open up new, creative thought. Therefore, I conceive of "limitations" here as opportunities for future research.

First of all, my study focused mostly on a small number of practices at just one type of higher education institution – community colleges – in only one state. In Chapter 5, I stated that



I had to omit an analysis of curricular practices, extracurricular practices, and assessment practices due to concerns about length. Examining these practices and others in other states might expand our understanding of how a vocationalist focus in community colleges is impacting students. In addition, an investigation into how the power relations of vocationalism are impacting secondary education, especially high schools, and senior institutions and students at the baccalaureate level may be informative. I myself have witnessed firsthand the current extreme emphasis on career development in public schools. End-of-grade test score reports for elementary school children now identify whether they are “college and career ready.” Fifth graders attend annual career fairs. High schools are actively steering their teenage students toward training for jobs in local industries. More investigation is needed to reveal the short-term and longer-term effects on our young people.

Another opportunity for future inquiry is further exploration of lived effects. In Chapters 4 and 5, I discussed the lived effects that occur when power relations reduce the number of preferred subjectivities for community college students and faculty. More research may uncover additional lived effects that did not arise in my analysis. In addition, I focused only on all community college students together as one group. I did not examine the experiences of specific student groups, such as women or students of color. I recommend further investigation into the particular lived effects of different demographic groups so that we might gain a more complete understanding of the ways that a vocationalist approach to community college education is harmful. Identification and interrogation of discursive rules is the first step in determining which of these rules is “legitimate” and which ones “can never be accepted under any circumstances” (Foucault, 1972, p. 26) because of the damage they do.

I also suggest that other researchers perform a similar poststructural study to expand on my own findings. As I swirled together theory, practices, and my own thoughts about how each informed the other, I generated one possible description. Plus, as I mentioned in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, my thinking was at all times filtered through the particular subject positions that I myself inhabit. Additional research from other perspectives would augment my own personal conclusions.

Finally, because power relations are “mobile, reversible, and unstable” (Foucault, 1997, p. 292) and constantly on the move, always evolving and changing, I recommend ongoing inquiry into the purposes of community college education. My study examined practices over one brief period in time, capturing a description of the power relations at work during that time alone. While this characteristic of my study is inherent in a poststructural view of the world, it means that this topic will need ongoing consideration into the future.

### **Implications for Educational Leadership**

In these final sections of my dissertation, I focus on the practices of freedom and how they are practiced at the individual level and on a broader scale to oppose the narrowing of community college purposes to vocationalism. Now that I have established the limited ways of being that are imposed upon us, I can explore the ways that we educators can cross the barriers into new territory (Oksala, 2005). In so doing, I take up one final subjectivity: *educational visionary*, a subject who allows herself the freedom to imagine a future in which community college students, in particular, feel less constrained and able to pursue any path that beckons to them. To inhabit this subject position is to stop seeing the world in terms of old binaries (such as normal/deviant), to reject the notion that these useless binaries contribute to our understanding in any way, and to accept that we actually live in a world of “perpetual differences” (Foucault,

1991a, p. 62). Becoming an *educational visionary* is to obey the rules of a discourse that opposes the values of neoliberal ideology and its notion that a fulfilling life is about material wealth, pushes back against the current tendency to believe in predestination and “assign” certain groups to certain jobs, and, instead, presents all people with a full array of options and encourages everyone to pursue holistic self-development.

In Chapter 5, I explained the poststructuralist view of freedom as practices that resist power’s aims. Freedom is practiced by individual subjects, first of all, when they are able to reflect on their own subject positions. According to Oksala (2005), “The subject exercises freedom in withdrawing from itself and problematizing its behaviour, its beliefs and the social field of which it is part” (p. 181). For example, this research project has, for me, been an exercise in recognizing and disturbing my own *workforce developer* subjectivity and examining how it negatively influences the community college students with whom I interact. In problematizing my own behavior, I came to see how subjugating ourselves to those who embody neoliberalism causes community college leaders to damage themselves by putting limitations on what they can become and, in so doing, damage students by discouraging them from realizing their full potential.

Once one’s subject position has been revealed, the next practice of freedom involves freeing one’s thought and using one’s imagination to conjure alternatives to the limited set of options offered by power relations. I, for example, imagine the faculty and staff of higher education living in a world that has thrown off the yoke of neoliberalism and refused to subjugate itself to a damaging economic theory. As Hanson (2010) put it,

faculty willing to serve as social critics are as indispensable to a free society as an independent press. Like journalists, faculty are obliged to speak, write, and teach along

moral lines, whether or not those lines coincide with the interests of wealth and power.

(p. 124)

For me, teaching along moral lines means encouraging all students to read, to stay informed, to be intellectually curious, to learn for the sake of learning, and to continue their education (formally and informally) throughout their lives. I imagine a resurrected belief in higher education as transformative in all spheres of life, and I imagine educators rededicating themselves to equipping students with the skills and traits they will need for success in all of those spheres. I imagine all students being encouraged to develop themselves holistically as human beings in many different roles, with *worker* being just one of them. I imagine a time when the mission statements of higher education institutions look more like this one from the 1920s:

The paramount obligation of a college is to develop in its students the ability to think clearly and independently, and the ability to live confidently, courageously, and hopefully. (Deresiewicz, 2015, p. 25)

I imagine community college personnel, especially faculty, who have reclaimed the broader, historic purposes of higher education and embody and enact these purposes every day.

Once these new possibilities can be imagined, they can become new options, new ways of being and becoming. As Oksala (2005) wrote, the subject exercising freedom “materializes the possibilities that are opened around it” (p. 190), even changing our subjectivities. No longer must we think and behave as mere workers or workforce developers; instead, the practices of freedom permit us to see ourselves and our students as human beings enriching our whole lives through education.

These practices can remain at the individual level or be employed for larger-scale change. One strategy for realizing larger-scale change is to expose the strategies of power and their effects. According to Foucault (1978a),

Power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms. (p. 86)

Scholarly work, which has long decried neoliberalism's annexation of higher education and the narrowing of higher education purposes, often employs this tactic. A few of these works that are referenced in this dissertation include "The Neoliberal Arts" (2015) by William Deresiewicz; *Neoliberalism's War on Higher Education* (2014) by Henry Giroux; *Income Inequality, Neoliberalism, and the American Community College* (2017) by Patrick Sullivan; *The Community College and the Good Society* (2010) by Chad Hanson; and research by D.F. Ayers (2005, 2013). This dissertation, too, serves as my own contribution to the conversation about the purposes of community college education.

*Agents of challenge* who are drawn into the discourse of comprehensive education call into question the knowledges and norms of power/knowledge relations that promote job preparation as the sole or most important purpose of education; consequently, they are in constant conflict with the prevailing "truths" (Mills, 2004). Their own "truth" holds that a predominantly vocationalist approach to education is undesirable because it can become exploitative, potentially oppressive to lower socioeconomic classes, and undemocratic. In fact, they find these outcomes so disturbing that they are likely to display what Foucault would describe as the "savage" kind of resistance among a "multiplicity of resistances"; the often alarmed or critical tone of these scholars' work indicates an "inflamed" response to their subject matter (Foucault, 1978a, p. 96).

Although their “truth” is marginalized by power relations, it operates according to its own set of discursive rules that make this scholarship possible. The scholars of Academia are viewed as qualified to produce new knowledge; thus, they convey “expert” discourse. They enjoy the right of academic freedom, which is defended by both American democracy and Academia, in their pursuit of this knowledge. When they defend the value of broad education, they draw upon a long history of broad education in both U.S. public schools and institutions of higher education, where students have had, for centuries, to display competencies in a variety of different academic subject areas, from English to social studies to math to history to science.

These scholars’ practices challenge pervasive ways of thinking, open up “spaces for disruption”, and create the possibility of transformation (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 119). When scholars describe what power is doing and producing, power is exposed and its work undermined. For example, when they call attention to neoliberal-influenced practices in education, they shine a bright light onto those practices’ damaging effects. In so doing, they reveal the dark side of the status quo and stimulate interest in reform. They also win new converts to the resistance, who may embody that resistance via additional scholarship or other forms of opposition, such as grassroots protests. I myself serve as an example of someone whose conversion occurred in reading poststructural theory alongside critiques of neoliberal economic theory. As a result, I have transformed myself into an *agent of challenge*.

A second strategy for achieving larger-scale change, which is practiced by both scholars and advocacy organizations, is to advance a competing “reverse discourse” (Foucault 1978a, p. 101) that seeks to constrain the discursive rules and norms of the power relations of vocationalism and to re-legitimize knowledges that have been “disqualified” and “subjugated” (Foucault, 2003, p. 7). This is the alternative “truth” that the study of the liberal arts in general

(and the humanities more specifically) is both necessary and valuable in community college education. The Community College Humanities Association, for example, is “dedicated to preserving and strengthening the humanities in two-year colleges.” Because humanities courses tend to be one of the primary places where community colleges address the personal development and public good purposes of higher education, this organization’s work is an important bulwark against attempts to narrow the purposes of a community college education.

Perhaps the staunchest advocate of higher education’s broader purposes, though, is the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), whose mission is “to advance the vitality and public standing of liberal education by making quality and equity the foundations for excellence in undergraduate education in service to democracy” (*Mission & Strategic Plan*). To achieve this goal, the AAC&U publishes research, provides faculty and leadership development, and offers tools and resources to assist all higher education personnel in advocating for liberal education. As organizations like these pursue these “contrary objectives” (Foucault, 1978a, p. 100), their resistance might be characterized as the “concerted” type (Foucault, 1978a, p. 96), for they doggedly work, year after year, to undermine power relations by promoting increasingly endangered knowledges and reviving silenced subjectivities.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

The purposes of community college education are important because, as Tierney (1991) wrote in *Ideology and Identity in Postsecondary Institutions*, “A concern with institutional purpose is essentially a moral question that demands a wider range of political and theoretical consideration” (as cited in Hanson, 2010, p. 25). Decisions about what citizens should learn are moral decisions because they can profoundly affect the lives of individual human beings and society overall.

One of my goals for my dissertation was to urge readers to consider this moral question as it applies to the purposes we determine for our community colleges. It was never my intention to criticize the job training provided in community colleges or to recommend that it be curtailed or eliminated. Instead, I sought to use the tools of Foucault-influenced poststructural theory to interrogate the privileging of job training over other equally important types of education. Why is this occurring? Who wins? Who loses?

We all lose, it seems to me, if we fail to educate all citizens to their highest potential. When this happens, we fail in our duty to our fellow human beings, and we fail to cultivate a broadly educated citizenry to deal with the enormous societal problems we face, from environmental destruction to poverty to terrorism. As stated in the 1947 Truman Commission's report *Higher Education for American Democracy*,

Universal education is indispensable to the full and living realization of the democratic ideal....Education that...*ennobles* [emphasis added] must be made equally available to all. Justice to the individual demands this; the safety and progress of the Nation depend upon it. America cannot afford to let any of its potential human resources go undiscovered and undeveloped. (p. 101)

Job training alone cannot “ennoble” people. Broad education—with its relentless insistence on development of the individual's intellect and talents and its expectation of civic participation—is what elevates people and bestows dignity. Therefore, it is incumbent upon community college leaders who have dedicated their careers to preserving the democratic ideal to challenge and change any structure that shapes discourse to lower expectations and shut down possibilities for certain citizens. These leaders, like me, could step back from their *workforce developer*



subjectivity to inhabit the *educational visionary* subjectivity and to advocate for a complete and comprehensive education for all.

Community colleges are the institutions where many of our most vulnerable citizens go to further their education. These students, too, deserve to be broadly educated. They, too, will be needed to help solve the problems we are facing. Consequently, it is my hope that this dissertation will inspire readers to continue to question and oppose any attempts to narrow the purposes of a community college education.

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## **Vita**

Ann Marie McNeely is a native of Orlando, Florida, who permanently relocated to North Carolina in 1992. After completing an Associate in Arts degree, she earned a Bachelor of Arts in English and a Master of Arts in English at the University of Central Florida. She also completed an Education Specialist degree in Community College & University Leadership and a Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership, both from Appalachian State University.

She has served as a community college instructor and/or administrator for over 25 years. Currently, she serves in the role of academic dean over a division that includes all of the liberal arts: English, humanities, social sciences, physical education, science, and mathematics.

She has also worked as a freelance writer and is the author of several composition textbooks, magazine articles, essays, and poems.

Her future plans include continuing to engage in poststructural inquiry and advocate for the broader, historical purposes of community college education.